

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Children of Vienna

The Inquest

Scene in Passing

By the Waters of Babylon

Blind Man's Buff

Failure of a Hero

Zaharoff

Mammon

Flood

Etc.

Insurrection In Poshansk

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CHAPTER I

AT the signal,* two heavy, short-legged, broad-beamed men detached themselves from the porch of the hotel, an edifice built of logs, two storeys high, six windows across. They looked like brothers; twin brothers possibly. They carried the twin poles of the furled streamer between them, running as fast as their high rubber boots permitted. As they climbed down the short flight of steep steps from Stalin Boulevard into the wet clay both fell, but struggled up at once and rushed on, bespattered, heavy-footed, down the short slippery slope that will become the People's Terrace Garden for Rest and Culture. They rushed towards the railway station, a long, low wooden cabin; it will be built of stone, under the next Five Year Plan. Just above its entrance they stopped, panting heavily, and unfurled the streamer. It read, "We greet thee, United States of America."

At the same moment, Citizen Gorbakov, manager of the Stakhanovite Provisions Distribution Centre, or Staprodisc, stepped outside and started waving. Senior Nurse Probinkova, at the first-floor window of the hospital opposite (it will be a hospital once there is a doctor)—the nurse, then, who could only observe the shop but not the slope, thereupon shepherded the twelve walking patients out on to the roof, all carrying paper flags. The thirty-one school-children were by then outside, led by the elementary teacher, Cultural Propagator Leibovich. Holobenko of the Press Trust was ill, so Ninotchka Holobenka carried out the big portrait camera and the tripod to the vantage point where they must come up the steps, out of the clay. There were by then at least a hundred citizens in Stalin Boulevard, crowding outside the hotel and waving. Six soldiers, of the Troops of the Ministry of the Interior, held them back, to keep a free passage from the station steps to the entrance of the hotel.

The doors burst open. A lean youth rushed out. He was fiery-eyed and pale. He was still wearing the old quilted kapok jacket they had given him back in camp for summer wear, but he already had a pair of winter boots that must be his private property. Behind

him a guard rushed out, keeping at a distance of six feet, lowered rifle in both hands, with fixed bayonet. The youth rushed forward, carrying the megaphone in his slim-fingered, emaciated hand. He stopped on the parapet, the guard with the bayonet behind him. Through the megaphone, out over what will become the People's Garden, over the heads of the two streamer-bearers planted half-way down in the clay, he boomed in the English language, "The citizens of Poskansk greet you, Mr. Watkins."

And then, Borodin pushed open the double window of the parlour, up in the hotel. It could be seen that he had squeezed his bulk into his dress uniform as a captain of the Interior Troops. He shouted, "All of you—stop!"

The window closed. The two men in the People's Garden furled their streamer and struggled back up through the clay, panting. The manager of Staprodisc stepped back into the shop and sold a tin of American Lend-Lease spam to the head of the Road Construction Department. The hospital sweeper, a prisoner nurse, stepped out to Senior Nurse Probinkova to say that No. 428 had died meanwhile, and they all went inside. The population of Stalin Boulevard dispersed. Only the youth with the megaphone stood idly at the parapet for another moment and looked about.

Close beneath him, at the bottom of the short slope, stood the railway station. It was deserted. Beyond it to the left, the muddy flat of clay stretched on for another three or four miles towards the foothills; the undulating skyline of Kolyma country, with larch trees and the red and violet patches of fire herb, wilting already, as the summer was nearly over, that day in August. That was where they had found gold. That was whence the little river came down, all but choked by the clay and mire of the coastal plain. Out of the youth's sight, it fed a pool, where a small seaplane might land in summer, or in winter a plane on skis. Draining the pool again, the river crept round the hillock with the township out to the Okhotsk Sea, barely three miles away, a grey melancholy waste unending, that would freeze in a few weeks and stay frozen for eight months, right across to Kamchatka peninsula, right down South towards the fair, warm city of Vladivostok, where the sea was blocked by pack ice only for four months in twelve.

The comrades geologists had found gold in that district of the great forests seven years before. Five years before the first shipload sailed from Magadan, halfway up from Vladivostok, and had struck the few miles inland. The railhead was three years old. So was the town. Stalin Boulevard had fourteen houses, hotel and hospital included. There were also five lanes branching off to the right and four lanes to the left. The Camp lay out of sight, down in the swamp across the river.

"Back," the soldier said behind the youth, who turned round quickly. The bayonet was now pointing at his chest. The man, large, ham-faced, went on: "Go back to the hotel. Hop it."

The youth said: "Leave me alone. I've got to shave another two customers."

"Hop it," the soldier said. He advanced with the bayonet.

The youth screamed at him: "Don't you know I have been released? I have been a Free Man for four weeks. Don't you see I'm employed by the Citizen Commandant Borodin to speak in a foreign language? Do you know what he is going to do to you? I tell him you molest the citizen who must greet the Americans? He will cut you in thin slices like a sausage—if there was a sausage."

The man looked dumbfounded, but did not lower the bayonet.

The youth, pale with exhaustion after the effort, said haughtily, "I'm now going to shave His Excellency the Head of Sanitation."

He turned. He was trembling suddenly. The guard trotted back to the hotel.

The manager of Staprodisc had sold the spam, and a jar of American first aid ointment to combat the effects of mustard gas, which the citizens scientists in Moscow had discovered to be equally effective against lice. Out of the hospital door, four prisoners and a guard with rifle and bayonet, turned into Gorki Street with the black handcart, with the remains of patient prisoner 428, a Kontrik, or Counter-Revolutionary Trotskyite Wrecker; there he lay, skin and bone, stripped, under the black rag with his head and left leg dangling over the cart's edge; a million flies were already swarming above his carcass; it was still summer, and yet frost might seize the mire overnight—better dig him in quick.

Behind the ground-floor window of the school, Assistant Elementary Teacher Tamara Varbarova was visible, and the heads

of some Yakut children from the village. From the blackboard, they spelled in unison:

"La urd.
Our lud.
Our lud urd.
Laq urd.
Stalin."

In October Revolution Square, an elderly woman was standing, a gaudy slattern, looking foreign. She was the seventh of the seven who had been released from Camp that morning; the six others had been snapped up at once. There she stood idly, looking at two dogs who were taking an interest in each other. Behind the Cultinist, or Cultural Institute, four soldiers with tommy-guns watched over the motor truck of Sub-District Commissioner Attona, who had come over by the new track, two hundred miles from Kamenskoe.

CHAPTER II

ATTONA was sitting with Borodin, the local Camp Commandant, in the parlour of the hotel. "All of you—stop!" Borodin had shouted out of the window, and then he turned and looked at his visitor. He had stopped the effort at his visitor's request. Small drops of sweat studded his forehead. The room was overheated. His dress uniform had grown much too tight. His eyes were troubled. He asked, "Shall I let them do it all over again, Comrade Sub-District Commissioner?"

Attona did not answer at once. He wore the uniform of a civilian Councillor of the Ministry of the Interior. He was a short-legged man of late middle age, fat yet elastic, as if sections of india-rubber and coiled springs and roller-skates had been built into his countenance. He did not answer at once because he disliked the situation. He was a good-natured man, fundamentally; live and let live; he had had to be nasty in his time, of course, while climbing the lower rungs of a police career, back home far away in the West in the Ukraine; nasty, or sly, or patriotic; call it what you will. But out here in the far North-East, in the Kolyma district of the Camps, he had settled down.

It was an idyllic appointment really, with the Inner Enemy behind barbed wire, tidily docketed—Kontrik, or Criminal, or Prisoner-of-War, whichever the case may be. The dirty work of dealing with those vermin preying on our Party and Country was left to the local Commandants, and with them he got along nicely—making the rounds in his American Lend-Lease truck, having a chat and a drink with each of them, checking production sheets, taking the product—gold—with an escort to Kamenskoe, whence it would go by ship or plane down to Magadan, to the coffers of the Ministry of the Interior, and so on to those of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. A peaceful job, with his nearest superior several hundreds of miles away. He hated discomfort at his time of life. The sixteen hours' drive over the rotten track still sat in his bones.

He had started immediately after the call from Khabarovsk. In

all his career he had never had a message, direct, secret, and personal, from so high up, or from so far away, or at such length. The orders were explicit, but at the same time stunningly incomprehensible. He had in turn at once established contact with this fellow here, Local Commandant Borodin, at the railhead, and had been under the distinct impression that he was not understood—first, for technical reasons, because the fellow could not work up enough electricity to achieve intelligible communication; and secondly, for considerations of intelligence: the fellow, or Comrade Local Commandant, just did not seem to grasp what this was about. (But then, who did?) So what was there left to a worried man but to come over personally? And the right thing too, as could be seen from the display the comrade had rigged up. What was it the comrade was asking him? Should he start all over again?

"No," Attona said as determinedly as his high-pitched voice permitted. For he was determined. If somebody's scalp must go, it should not be his. He hated screaming; he remembered with disgust the nights far back early in his career out West, when he had had to utter a great number of screams, or yells, at wretches suspected of—oh, suspected of one thing or another. He could still remember the terror in their eyes at his sudden screams. The inconvenience of it, having to stay up night after night to scream at them and make them confess that—well, whatever there was to be confessed. There he was now, after a screamless middle age, forced to scream again. With blood shooting into his puffy face, he screamed, high-pitched, "Citizen Local Commandant, who were the two men with the streamer, and who devised the text?"

"The two men——" Borodin said quickly, and then he stopped. It was no use. Sorrow shone in his large brown eyes; the eyes of a hind faced by its torturer. It was no use trying to explain; this comrade of higher rank and of Moscow cunning was after his blood.

Borodin was a man of the people, whoever his people may have been, and he was an Asiatic, if he was one. He had been registered as a child found parentless after the Revolution at Krasnoyarsk. Yes, he was an Asiatic. A military man, too. He had been through two purges, let alone the special check-up when he volunteered for service up North-East; he knew what it meant if a superior in the

Ministry stopped calling you Comrade and started calling you Citizens.

Ah, it had been a good time up here. A full, healthy life. His eyes were melancholy as he thought of the healthy life that seemed now nearly over. Who were the two men and who devised the text? Was that what he had been asked? He said: "Comrade Sub-District Commissioner, the two men are former prisoners, who have been duly released and settled. Not Kontriks who've served their time, of course. I should not entrust such vermin even after release with an assignment of Socialist responsibility." "Which would have been the noose round my neck," Borodin concluded the sentence to himself.

A pity, Attona thought. This unpleasant obligation to scream would have been over and done with; it would have been the noose. Just two harmless killers, probably, or bandits. He nodded. "Just two reformed former anti-social elements?" he asked peacefully.

Borodin said: "They were German war prisoners. They had been anti-Hitlerite heroes belonging to the underground partisan array in Germany, until they were forced to march against the Soviet Union, where they surrendered. Even in camp they showed their proletarian watchfulness by mercilessly denouncing all war criminals and potentially hostile elements among their compatriots. As a reward, and also because their lives were threatened by their criminal Fascist camp mates, they have been released and settled. They are under surveillance, of course, and under prohibition to move more than three miles without a special *propusk*, and of course under a labour contract with the usual supreme penalty for sabotaging the People's Effort by absenting themselves from their place of work or coming late—but apart from that they are absolutely free. They are twin brothers called Schwanneke, but have applied to have it changed to Schwankov. One of the two is deaf." He stopped for breath. He was not displeased with himself; he had said it all in the right way. Escaped.

Escaped, thought Attona. He would dearly have liked to let it all rest there, and to relax. Have a nap, for instance, on the highly comfortable divan on which he was sitting. He could not afford it. Blood shooting into his face, he screamed: "And the inscription on

the streamer, the inscription? 'We greet thee, United States of America!' Ha."

He stopped and glanced sideways at the third man in the room, who had not uttered a word so far. For there was a third man. He had come in in Attona's wake, a tall, sun-bronzed young man in a tightly-fitting military greatcoat reaching down to the ankles, with impeccably polished top-boots and a grey astrakhan fur cap, and with a large jaw and other heroic features on which he preserved a permanent, silent, contemptuous scowl. He had clicked his heels, and had introduced himself shatteringly with a single name, not giving his rank, or mentioning his first name and patronymic, and thus conveying that this single name was one of his own choice.

"Yakut" he had chosen to call himself, as a Greater One had chosen to call himself with a Name of Steel. It was the name, no doubt, of his people, the tribe of nomadic hunters populating this very region of Kolyma at a rate of one man to fifty square miles; But you just wait a little while until under the brotherly guidance of the Ministry and the Dalstroi Trust they eradicate illiteracy, introduce culture and hygiene, and throw up another few super-specimens like this one. "Yakut," he had said, heel-clicking; he did not make himself comfortable, but sat there with his jaw set, with his fur cap on, on a straight stool, erect.

He had sat there erect and scowling ever since; and it was in consideration of his presence that the exchange between Local Commandant and Sub-District Commissioner had to be carried on inexorably without the niceties of human relationship that you can afford in a tête-à-tête. This hero probably was ambitious. He had been posted to Attona two months ago straight from Khabarovsk, ostensibly as an honorary adjutant on his gold-collecting errands. In those two months he had not left his ward, or superior, or prey, for two hours at a stretch. He did not speak. For two months he had scowled silently.

"And the inscription?" Attona screamed with the prescribed degree of militancy, fit at any moment to be reported back to headquarters at Khabarovsk; "and the inscription, Citizen Local Commandant? 'We greet thee, United States of America.' Ha. Where is your proletarian dignity? Have you no one better to greet? Make

it 'We Greet Comrade Stalin!' Just to show them." He glanced at the scowler, sideways.

Borodin's hind's eyes were sorrowful. The sorrow of his large Russian soul swelled his too voluminous chest under his too narrow uniform as he spread his arms in an ample gesture of helplessness and trustful honesty.

"Comrade Sub-District Commissioner," he said, "you communicated with me and gave me your instructions, but I couldn't quite get them, our electricity supply being what it is, though no doubt next year it will be ample if the local production target is reached, which no doubt it will, even more than a hundred per cent, and that in eleven months, or in ten months even, but pending that, Comrade—and even if there were all the electricity of our Soviet Union available up here, but it isn't—but never mind! For even then your instructions would probably have been excellently clear to a culturally trained Comrade in the Ministry, but I am a simple soldier only fit to watch over imprisoned Enemies of the People or Anti-social Elements, whichever the case may be, but not fit to understand diplomacy. We soldiers, like the comrade here and myself, have only simple, honest, straightforward brains."

Not at all bad, he and Attona thought at the same time; not at all bad—this effort at enlisting the military fellow-feeling of the scowler. Though he goes on scowling unshakably, Attona went on thinking alone; it serves you right. However, it is time for me to cut the cackle and get down to business.

The business was this. Mr. Walter M. Watkins, a prominent and distinguished citizen of the United States of America, had been encouraged by his President, after a certain political contest, to set out on a mission to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, to proffer and in turn to arouse good will. Whether certain highly confidential negotiations were contemplated on that occasion, and who contemplated them first, was anyone's guess. The goodwill part having been successfully accomplished, the question of those negotiations arose, as it were, on the distinguished traveller's way out to Vladivostok, which was intended to be his last stop before returning to the United States. The topic was not divulged. There were rumours among the half-dozen people of the President's

entourage in the United States. At the distinguished visitor's stop at the time, in the town of Khabarovsk, there were not even rumours. Had there been, they would not have been passed on in an official communication to Sub-District Commissioner Attona several hundred miles up North.

What was passed on to him was that in the course of conversation, the important stranger had uttered a wish to round off his impressions of the Soviet Union by a jaunt up North. He happened to be, among many other things, a President, Vice-President, or Director, of fourteen mining corporations—a gold-mining expert of international repute. Why, he held a little patent or two in his own name, regarding certain secret chemical processes. He had seen gold-mining in four continents. What was there more natural than for him to ask his hosts to be taken up North for a day or so, to have a fleeting glance at least at the new, fabulous California they were said to be developing up in Kolyma country in the Arctic zone?

He said it lightly. They had invited him to go wherever he wished, he added, smiling; well, that was his little wish. What was the name of the place again they were said to be building up just now, up there? It had been mentioned to him by someone, back in the United States. He had forgotten. So it was Poshansk? Well, then let it be Poshansk! "It's late for today," he went on, "and I want to dictate a few letters, but what about tomorrow? Is there an airfield there? There isn't? But there is a branch railway, surely, going up that way? Fine. Let's run up to Poshansk tomorrow, so I can get over to Vladivostok in time to take my plane home; and I have an idea that one of the gentlemen of your Foreign Office might be coming over from Moscow to say good-bye and have a last chat with me." He looked into their faces smilingly, into their little silence, and asked, "Is that okay with you, gentlemen?"

The little silence lasted for another second. Then Bebitz, attached to the distinguished visitor by the Department of Foreign Trade, looked at Trétjak, Assistant Head of the Far Eastern Division of the Ministry, and said, "Of course it is—as you say—okay."

Five minutes later, having looked up the name of the Sub-District Commissioner up at Kamenskoe, a Comrade Attona, Trétjak went over to the State Police short-wave transmitter room and started cabling.

CHAPTER III

ALL the time during Attona's recital Borodin's hind's eyes had grown more sorrowful. He could see now. He had striven valiantly and organized a truly impressive reception, but it was not going to please those vast personages who were about to descend on him. At an earlier stage of his visitor's explanations he had still clung to the idea that after all, at a more discreet and intimate moment, say when the formidable scowler walked out to relieve himself, he might get the Sub-District Commissioner to write out for him a testimonial; why, some sort of a testimonial, any sort would come in useful, say, about his proletarian zeal or what not. And he had a shrewd idea that Attona himself might harbour a similar desire; just look at his worried face, he too is a comrade and a Russian and in trouble, so why not exchange testimonials? A Local Commandant might well testify to a Sub-District Commissioner too that he was a zealous Party member mercilessly watching over accounts and camps and so on—so why not swap?

But as Attona proceeded he gave it up. First, the scowler was not human, he did not seem to be feeling any human urge; maybe it went with the heroic type of this younger, Soviet-born generation, or maybe he was determined not to miss a word, in proletarian watchfulness, that might come in handy for a full denunciation. And second, what was the use of even trying to ward off disaster?

"Comrade Attona," Borodin said, "there are cases when Soviet Man must look the future straight in the face, whatever that may be, and right too, considering it's bound to be such a great future. This town, for instance, there was a moment four years ago, after a first initial setback, you know what I mean, when it had thirty-six inhabitants, and today we have two thousand two hundred and four, and four thousand next year maybe; we've already the People's Terrace Garden fully mapped out, and why not? Or take the Camp, we had one hundred and fifty prisoners left after that little setback. you know, four years ago—and where are we now?

"Or take the permanent frost; you couldn't dig two inches when

we came first, before you got down to the eternal ice, and now look at the depth of the mud; there are places we have discovered where we can bury the human wastage from the Camp, or a comrade, whichever the case may be, so deep that not a hand or a foot would ever look out again, such is the progress of cultivation of the soil with merciless proletarian energy; and probably the weather too goes on improving, with our weather experts the best in the world.

"So there is a case for determined optimism all round, but, Comrade Sub-District Commissioner, there are cases and cases, and I am good at understanding. I understood two purges and one close screening before they transferred me up here, it's all in the files—but the case you are bringing up, Comrade, is a case no one can understand. They will come today, you say, but who are 'they'? There will be, first, the American Comrade, or Citizen, rather, is what one has to call such a—well, they are friends. Their lend-lease flourbags, for instance—would you believe that this beautiful, beautiful embroidery on the divan you are sitting on is devised on one of their flourbags? It is ours personally, and has been sent over to beautify the room for the occasion. They can be put to many uses, and so I say they are our friends. You say there will be this citizen, and second, there will be that one you call Smith—and do you know who he is, his secretary you call him, would he be the secretary of his Party cell, or would he be the controller the American secret police gives to him, or whatever they call it there? Then, you say, third, he comes with his son. Now that is simple, we all know what that is: a son. But will that be all there is—three American capitalists? Who of our own Soviet men will come with them? Comrade Bebitz of the Foreign Trade Department in Moscow, whom they have attached to the American; he would come up with him probably. Do you know if Comrade Tretjak of our Far Eastern Department is coming too? And who else, and how shall we put them up? The most honoured ones can sleep in this room, which is the only room in our young town so far where we can really with dignity put up distinguished travellers. There is, of course, the parlour of the Secretary of our local Party cell, Comrade Gorbakov, over at the Staprodisc store, but he keeps part of his perishable provisions there, particularly the special spiced herring which is reserved for shock workers, and certain amenities

are greatly inferior, only straw palliasses filled with wood-shavings because it has been scientifically established that straw is only healthy if it is clean, while of course here is the best room of the hotel. As you can see, Comrade, we have this divan, which is excellent for two, and a third can have this comfortable chair. We have an excellent cabinet-maker in the Camp, a Kontrik, admitted, but as a cabinet-maker he is a Socialist. And the fourth can sleep here on the reindeer skin on the floor next to the stove—it is the best place in fact, though maybe the little bed birds creep there more numerous than at the cooler spots! But the other rooms in this hotel are only good enough for a simple military man like myself, say, or Comrade Yakut here, who one can see is used to the heroic hardships of military life.” He turned to the young man and asked, “Am I right?”

He elicited no reply. The scowler sat there, erect, uncomfortable, and scowled in silence.

Borodin went on, “So those other rooms are good enough for military men—but they are not yet quite up to the cultural specifications they are used to in the big towns.” He paused. There was no answer. He went on mournfully, “Lastly that matter regarding the man Toboggen.”

“Regarding whom?” Attona asked.

“Regarding Toboggen,” Borodin repeated. “The second message that came through from Kamenskoe this morning.”

“This morning I was on my way.”

“It came through from Kamenskoe,” Borodin said stubbornly. “Regarding one Toboggen to be fetched here to town and held ready for the visitors.”

Attona was alarmed. What was this again? He did not know about this. Another danger? “Must have been the telegraphist after my departure.”

He looked up. The door had opened. Borodin said, “Comrade, meet my wife.”

The citizeness who had come in, Borodina, was still in her good fur coat, as she had herself driven over from the Commandant's lodgings outside the Camp. She carried a tray with glasses of strong, black, steaming tea. The thing to do would have been to carry in

the samovar, or order it to be carried in, but she was too tired for the effort; also, what did it matter? Back home, in the bosom of her family in the great city of Vladivostok, she would have carried in the samovar; halfway up in the town of Magadan she would still have carried in the samovar; but not up here in this melancholy wilderness.

Next to the steaming glasses, she had emptied into a receptacle the contents of an American lend-lease tin which she had brought along, labelled "Canned Cookies"; and just outside the door she had no longer resisted, she had tried one of those strange capitalist products, and she must have idled over it a little, for now, as she stepped in, the tea was no longer really quite so steaming, and of the said Canned Cookies she was just eating item number three, with a dash of an American substance labelled "Condensed Milk (Sweetened)". The citizeness ate the item greedily, and joylessly. This world was joyless. The Canned Cookie was too sweet. The Condensed Milk (Sweetened) would again make her two pounds the heavier by next week. She punished the world by eating this joyless stuff. Yes, this world was joyless. Constipation, too. Gobbling it down, to forget. Her family, though highly esteemed citizens, had not abandoned religion; she had been brought up accordingly herself; but if there were really a God, there would be no constipation.

She was still good-looking in a depressing way, like a marble angel with hammer and sickle produced by the stonemasons' co-operative to watch over a Stakhanovite's or high Party official's grave. Oh, she thought. Having accepted the Cultural Organizer's job in this rough township, in which there was so little culture to organize. Getting up late. Walking once a day, once up, once down, Stalin Boulevard from the People's Garden Terrace parapet to the police prison; the Commandant's lady, nodding condescendingly at citizens' greetings. Or driving out, with high-heeled shoes, fur-coated, manicured and rouged, preposterously townishly dressed (for whom, for whom?)—driving out, then, by sleigh or carriage (it was a cart!)—out to the remote Women's Camp, to have those five females escorted from the workshop over to the orderly room. They were mere Kontriks, enemies of the people, one a University teacher under a ten years' sentence for having shown a Trotskyite-

Fascist deviations in the interpretation of archaeological excavations, but their embroidery, on American flourbag canvas, was highly artistic; and they did not execute it at the expense of the State, they did it for the Commandant's wife as voluntary shock workers in their time of leisure, after twelve hours' tree-felling in snow or muck, whichever the case may be, in the nearby woods.

Or having a Culture Cell meeting at the Cultinst, with the Elementary Teacher Leibovich and the Citizen FiltyuK representing the cultural interests of the Camp guards and with Assistant Party Secretary Solovejchik—and what shall we arrange next? The October Day Celebration? And shall we have dancing after the Listening-in-to-Comrade-Stalin's-Speech, or shall we again ask Comrade Gorbakov of the Staprodisc to sing the duet with Citizeness Ninotchka Holobenka, our soprano photographer—the same duet they sang at Comrade Stalin's birthday and on the First of May—or shall we this time have that ventriloquist act by the new special militia guard, who came up with the last transport of replacements of human wastage in the camp? It's that funny act; we had it only four times, we had the duet eleven times.

That would finish the morning's exertions for Citizeness Borodina. Then the midday meal down in the communal Camp guards' eating-room, eating tinned soup and whalemeat steak with two tinned vegetables and white bread and tea and biscuits and a sweet, democratically at the same table as the ordinary workers who'd get only black bread and half a herring with cabbage and some tea. (But then, it is a democratic incentive for them to embark on free Socialist competition; they need only surpass their Work Norm and, say, double it, and be Two Hundred Percenters, and they'll get Stakhanovite rations too!) That, then, would be the midday meal. Then the nap, with one of thirty Stalin Prize Novels from the Library on your lap. Snoring, too, you have a suspicion. A nap which of late has a tendency to protract itself until teatime. Then tea, with——

"But you never told me, Commandant," she addressed her husband as she entered with her tray, "you never told me you were expecting visitors! Driving over so early, leaving me behind at our house. I should have come along at once. I was next door, having a little nap." Borodin said something in reply; she was not interested

in his replies. She turned to the visitors, displaying her impeccable white teeth with glittering steel crowns on three of them; and, having shaken hands, offering glasses about, she asked, "You have come up from Vladivostok, Tovarichi?"

Attona—(ah, what a citizeness! What a woman!)—said, "Merely an advance guard, merely from Kamanskoe, Comrade." He was fidgety. Turning to the Commandant, he went on, "What was that again you said? 'To be fetched here to town and held ready for visitors?' The telegraphist must have given that through to you in my absence. What was the name again? Toboggen?" Once more he turned to the woman, like a gentleman. "The stern demands of office. Forgive me, Comrade Borodina."

The well-found one nodded condescendingly, no longer looking at Attona, looking with languid eyes at the other visitor, who clicked heels as he took the tea glass, and looked at her fiercely-fierily, and did not say a word, and swallowed his tea in one gulp—you might just as well take it for an ovation.

The citizeness took it for such, and smiled. 'I ought to have used my scent,' she thought; 'I still have the scent.' "For I am from Vladivostok," she said languidly, to no one in particular, and certainly not to Borodin, and sat down on the inviting sofa amply, with the ample and condescending gesture of a District Presidentess, of a Wife of a Member of the Politbureau. "A Vladivostoenska," she repeated melodiously, inviting the visitors to take their seats, to her right and to her left, on this voluptuous softness, built up of sheepskin-lined prisoners' winter vests topped with a good layer of kapok extracted from the quilting of prisoners' summer vests, and all covered with flourbags artistically embroidered by the voluntary shock brigade effort of an archaologist.

"Ah, Vladivostok," Attona said, high-pitched, while Yakut merely sat there fierily. "I sensed at once that you are a Large-City-Of-the-First-Order Citizeness."

Borodina said, "Before my father was elected Regimental Commander in the West Suburb Militia he was a shock worker in the Prespoktrust!"

"Ah, there you are," said Attona smoothly. Fidgety, he turned again to the Commandant. "Did you say Toboggen? The name sounds familiar, somehow." His heart started beating heavily all of

a sudden. "Did you take it down?" The well-found one forgotten, he requested hoarsely, "Show me the message."

Hind's eyes took a piece of paper from his pocket and held it out to Attona in his unwieldy hand, not of a penpusher, but of a soldier who has learned how to write late in life. It read: "*Khabarovsk request Commandant Poshansk produce Antoni Maximovitch Toboggen presentable state for tomorrow's visitors.*"

Attona put the sheet down with slow circumspection. The name had had good reason to sound familiar. It was the great Toboggen all right; great, that was, thirteen or fifteen years ago, until—— But had he not been condemned to death, with the other batch? Or had he split on the others at the great trial, and had thereupon disappeared? Liquidated administratively, as was presumed in such cases? Attona was no longer up to scratch in that remote section of Party history; it was sometimes unhealthy to be quite up to scratch. The man was a Finn really, was he not? Or an Esthonian? And it was now really he who—who lived? And who was——? He took up the sheet once more and read it over carefully. "Produce Toboggen presentable state——"

The lady said, "But as a man of the world, of course you have been to Vladivostok, Comrade Sub-District Commissioner?"

He turned to her, roller-skatey and rubbery. "I have been to your home city only four months ago," he said like butter. "I have seen many pictures of the capitalist world—Paris and Belgrade and all. Compared with Vladivostok they are just heaps of cowdung nobody would put his foot into. Yes, thank you, Comrade Local Commandant," he went on mildly. Borodin had gone out and returned with the samovar.

The citizeness said, "And what does it look like in my city, which I ought never to have left, from which this citizen here, this Commandant husband of mine, ought never to have enticed me away into this——? What does it all look like now? Ah, the Robotnik Cinema in Molotov Boulevard, and Gorki Prospekt with the People's Gardens and October Revolution Hotel—not like this hovel here. Have they built October Revolution Hotel, which will be the highest hotel in all Asia once they build it really?"

"It will be built," Citizen Attona exclaimed, enthusiastic and fidgety; "we shall build hundreds of such hotels everywhere, with

escalators to shoot up into the highest floors, and with water which comes hot out of the wall, and with automatic bedbug killers as I have seen on my travels, and with——”

He started. Having seized another glass of tea, the scowler had jumped up. There he stood, angular. With his glass, staring at the hostess, the ample one, he clicked his heels, and yelled, “Yak! Kuk! Kruk! Stalin!” Then, in one huge gulp, he poured the steaming liquid down his throat. He grew very pale.

There was a short silence. Then Attona said brutally: “Citizen Commandant. It says here, ‘Produce Toboggen presentable state.’ In addition to devising streamers with remarkable inscriptions—what have you done about this?”

“All I could. My best,” the unfortunate man protested. “But what can I do? You knew the name? No idea who the bird is, I am sure. I looked him up, though. He has been settled up in the forest somewhere, two hundred miles from here, many years ago. Eight years, twelve? A Kontrik, but not in a camp. Individual exile, with a special remark on the index card, ‘To be isolated, to be watched.’”

Attona, louder, said, “What have you done about that, Citizen?” Ah, a lady, but this was a matter of somebody’s scalp.

Borodin—lost, lost! It did not matter any longer!—shouted: “How do you want me to watch a man two hundred miles up forest? He must be dead by now, anyway. They all die there inside three years at the most. How do they know down at Khabarovsk that he is still alive? All the same, I had the old little float-plane dragged out of the shed, the one that is no longer used. One of the lorry-drivers was so drunk he volunteered to go up with it, along the river. I sent a guard, too. What can I do more? If he is alive, they ought to be back by now, if they haven’t crashed.” Ah, shouting. It did not matter any longer.

Yakut had risen. He stood by the window. Now he gave a strange sound like a foreign bird. Borodin and Attona, shouting forgotten, rose and joined him, looking outside into the dusk.

Outside, in Stalin Boulevard, coming up from the river pool, where a small seaplane might alight, a man was walking. He was a tall, hefty man with a heavy frame or, rather, had once been so. Something must have hollowed him out; his cheeks were hollow, his eyes were deep-set, burning and dull at the same time, over-

shadowed by heavy brows. His hair was grey and wild. He was clad in rags. He had no cap, or must have lost it on the way over through the swamps. He wore a prisoner's regulation summer jacket, quilted with kapok. It was bespattered, as if he had fallen many times. With old denim trousers he wore the Kolyma prisoners' regulation boots, self-made, of sacking, with strips cut from old motor-car tyres to tread on. He tried to walk upright, but stumbled. He stumbled at every fourth or eighth or sixteenth step, depending on the soldier marching behind him with lowered rifle and bayonet. The soldier did not prod him with the point, though. He just urged him on, kicking him with his boot. Down the Boulevard they turned to the right, where the new police jail was, and dropped out of sight.

The three men at the window were standing there silently. Attona had grown pale, imperceptibly. In the end, he said lightly, "He will have to change."

Darkness was falling.

A whistle was heard somewhere, far away.

The woman stood behind them. She said, "The train."

CHAPTER IV

THERE had been some waving and shouting outside, but that stopped quickly. Maybe somebody called a halt. Or it was just too dark, though all the street lighting was on—the bulb in front of the hotel, the bulb in front of the hospital, and the station bulb. The reception arrangements were torn to shreds. Yes, somebody called a halt, as soon as the train had come to a stop. The visitors did not emerge. There was silence, a few military commands, and shuffling feet.

Steps approached the hotel out in the street, the door was thrown open, a non-commissioned officer appeared and stepped inside, into the narrow hall with its five preposterous basket chairs, two small round tables, and what might have been meant to become a reception desk. The man was very tall. He had a black patch over one eye. As Attona, Sub-District Commissioner, and Borodin, Commandant, moved to approach him—their welcoming smiles had not yet fully faded from their faces—he said, “Stop.” Then he said, “Railway Militia.” Then he stepped back into the doorway, and whistled.

The moment the train approached Yakut had gone down to the station. Now he came in from the street. The sergeant built himself up before him, towering, clicked heavy heels, saluted, and said nothing. Yakut’s scowl had stayed, but he had changed—mobile, with movements of an oddly feline, threatening subtlety.

To Attona, who moved to approach him, he said, “Stay.” Then he said, “Table.”

The sergeant seized one of the tables and a chair and carried them to one side, near the door, under the electric bulb.

Yakut took out a whistle. He whistled twice.

The door was pushed open once more. One man came in, of middle height, wrapped in a huge greatcoat that did not allow anyone to assess his figure. His face, grey, short-nosed, shaven, though with the stubble of a long railway journey, was almost invisible; he had the uniform cap pulled into it deeply, and he did

not put the collar down. On his shoulders he wore the high distinctions of the Ministry of the Interior.

"Sub-District Commissioner Attona." The rubbery man had presented himself militarily.

"Local Commandant Borodin." His heels clicked.

The newcomer touched his cap. He said, "Tretjak."

It was the only word he uttered. Soldiers, new arrivals obviously, had come in from all sides in the last minute. Yakut sat down behind the isolated table, on the isolated chair. Now Tretjak stepped up to him and nodded.

Yakut said, "Raid."

The one-eyed sergeant signed to some of the men to follow him. You could watch them disappear upstairs. You could hear them knock at doors along corridors; knock, and say, "Militia raid; open the door. Militia raid; open the door. Militia." There were shouts, questions, a quarrel, a woman's scream, a door splintering, burst open by heavy boots. Somebody in night attire, trying to escape, appeared at the top of the stairs, and was caught at that moment and dragged back into the invisible. A woman yelled, and was silenced, suddenly.

Then the sergeant came down again, and stepped in front of the seated man.

Yakut looked at him. Tretjak was standing by his side, motionless.

The sergeant said, "Seven single men, four couples."

"Couples?"

Borodin stepped forward. He ignored Yakut; he addressed the high official. "There were releases this morning, from the Women's Camp. They must settle in the district. There is much demand."

Yakut said, "Step back."

The sergeant said, "I brought them down, back stairs. Into the street, with the others. Forty-three altogether, with those we rounded up between station and hotel."

Yakut looked up to Tretjak, who nodded. Yakut said, "Send them in. The first five."

The door was thrown open. Outside, in the darkness, lit up by one flickering bulb lost in the vastness of the night, a knot of people became visible—men, women, some half-dressed, herded together

by soldiers with rifle and bayonet. Five of them were pushed inside. A small man with a liverish face, with horn-rimmed spectacles, with a shabby but lavish fur collar to his coat, tried to muscle in. "Let me get inside," he said, angry, gesticulating. "I'm an official." The door was closed against him, forcibly.

The five stood there in a huddle. The two bearers of the streamer were among them.

Yakut hit the top of his small table with his flat hand. There was sudden silence. Yakut said, "First."

The pair came forward militarily. One of them said, with a German accent so thick you could grip it with your hands, "Schwankov, Adolf. This is my twin brother, Schwankov, Max. He is a deaf mute."

"What?" said the other one, very loud.

The first roared into his ear, "I said you're a deaf mute."

The other one nodded, his face beaming with the satisfaction of having understood. "Yes," he said very loud, with a croaking voice.

"*Propusk*," said Yakut.

Handing him their papers, the first said, "The Nazi Fascist beasts hit him deaf mute in camp. Only because he did his proletarian duty and reported to our heroic Russian——" He stopped.

From the far end of the room, Borodin said, "The two German partisan fighters I explained to you."

Yakut looked at the papers with the disgust of the all but illiterate. The high official, Tretjak, immobile, bent over them from afar, and did not touch them.

Into their silence, the speaking Schwankov said, "They are still in the old name of Schwanneke."

Yakut, after a glance up at his superior, said, "Go." As the man moved forward as if to collect his papers, he yelled at him, "Go!" Then he said, "Next."

The next, a frightened-looking thin man, stepped up to the table and put down a stamped paper. He said, "Railway Travel Permission. I've come by the train, only from Golubenka, because my son lives here. He is a free citizen, like myself, and he wrote he can spare me a hundredweight of potatoes to lay in for winter, and a bit of cabbage, and so I thought——"

Yakut said, "Arrest."

The man started. Then he bowed twice, and between two soldiers who had stepped up to him he withdrew towards a back door.

Yakut said, "Next."

The next man to step up to the table put down his paper silently.

"Arrest," said Yakut; and, "Next."

The next man, the fifth of the five, pushed in front of the table by a soldier, was a very old man, oddly tall, of incredible frailty, with white locks hanging down his temples into a very thin white beard. He had a round black hat made of rabbit fur, and a shapeless overcoat that had grown much too large for him; it had been black once, but had now the greenish tinge of age.

Yakut, not looking up, with an impatient movement, held out his hand for the old man's paper. As he received nothing, he said, "*Propusk*."

"Yes," said the old man, smiling and nodding. "Yes, yes."

Yakut shouted, "Your *propusk*. Railway pass. Paper."

"Yes," said the old man. "I have been saved."

Somebody said, explaining, "The citizen is a little mad."

Yakut looked up, scowling.

"Old Lalles. A cadger," said somebody.

Yakut, looking up to the man behind him, asked quietly, "Arrest?"

Somebody said, "A Jewish citizen. Saved from the Nazis."

"Yes," said the old man in a weak yet strangely clear voice. "I have been saved."

The high official muttered a word, ununderstandable.

Yakut said, "Stop for interrogation."

One of the soldiers led old Lalles to one of the shabby basket-chairs. He sat down, gratified.

Yakut said, "Next five."

There were six, though. The five who were let in were joined by the little angry one with the spectacles, with the large fur collar to his coat. This time he managed to struggle inside before the door was closed on those left in the street. He came in protesting.

Yakut yelled, "Stop!" Into the silence, pointing at one man, he said, "You."

He was a Chinese—no, he was a Mongolian probably, and he was drunk. He wore heavily padded workman's dungarees that might be taken for a mechanic's flying-suit. "Oh," he said. "Och." He talked in a language you couldn't understand. One of the soldiers knew it; they had quite a palaver. He was a lorry-driver. He had been ordered by the Camp Commandant to fly out into the forest to collect a body, still upright on his legs, at Kontrik. Why did they make such a fuss about a single Kontrik anyway? Here, ask the Commandant who forced him, risking his life in a plane that wasn't one, without any instruments. You can fly such a plane there and back only on booze, only if you're drunk. Changing into Russian, he shouted, "Why not let that Kontrik freeze his legs off, as they all do, felling trees?"

He did not continue. On a sign from Yakut the one-eyed sergeant stepped up to him and felled him with one blow.

Yakut said, "Arrest." The man was dragged out, his boots bumping against the floor. Yakut said, "Next."

It was a pair. The man was tall and burly, with a paunch, a well-kept beard, a wealth of hair brushed upwards, turning grey. He wore pince-nez, with a ribbon, in front of sky-blue eyes. He had red cheeks. He looked like a boy who, without transition, has grown all of a sudden to be forty-five. He had knee-breeches and substantial boots. His wife, fair-haired, was ten years younger at least, respectably attired, well-found but small; she looked like a bantam hen paired with an outsize cock.

"Germans again," said someone at the back of the room in an undertone.

The grey-haired man heard it. In educated, fluent Russian—so fluent that its very fluency betrayed that it was not his mother tongue—he said: "The citizen is mistaken. We are Russian citizens born and bred. Wolga German citizens, of that ancient community which left Germany two hundred years ago in protest against Fascist oppression."

It was not quite true, historically speaking, the man thought, but they would not know. What they did know was that in 1941 those Wolga Germans had been transported to Siberia, *en bloc*, as potential traitors. Some survived the transport; too many to be put in camps. A few of them were settled about Poshansk.

The man stepped up to Yakut's table and put down some papers. He said, with his over-fluency, "We have come over from Cernagoa with horse and cart. Here is the *propusk*, here is the transfer of ration documents for one week, here is the political documentation. My name is Maier. We come over regularly every three months to see citizens of our national group." He added, "I heard some people referred to as 'couples apprehended in the bedrooms'. We are one of those couples. We were married fifteen years ago and have four daughters at home. Incidentally, we were fully dressed." His pince-nez glittered, modestly militant.

"Yes," said his wife. "I was preparing supper." It was the first time she had spoken.

Someone, from far off, said, "He is the priest."

"The Protestant Pastor, if you please," Pince-nez said primly. He had it all in the papers. It was all above-board, covered by a permit.

Yakut said, "Stays."

"And now listen," said somebody. It was the small one, the liverish one, with the large fur collar—much too large, it dwarfed his head sticking out above it. His eyes, behind his horn-rimmed spectacles, looked angry as a snake's. "And now listen," he said, stepping in front of Yakut's table. With his jerky step, his mock-prosperous overcoat flapped open for a moment and revealed the body of a puny man in incredibly dirty pyjamas before it closed again. "And now listen," he said. He took out a paper, lavishly rubber-stamped, and plonked it down on the table in front of the scowler and said, "There."

There it was indeed. The bearer, Ziklov by name, was holding a very modest office in the Dalstroï Trust—the trust that runs Arctic Development. But that was a screen. He was a Party man! A small Party man, certainly. But one of those small-men briefed by somebody very high up to keep his eyes skinned and send home reports on the Forces of the Interior! Tretjak had bent over the paper silently. Now he smiled sourly and stood erect again. Ziklov said, "I'm going to write to Comrade Arkadi Pavlovich of Magadan about this, and you know very well he works in with Comrade Pjotr Yljitch at Khabarovsk."

Who works in with Comrade Prokov in Moscow, Tretjak

knew, while his smile grew sourer; who works in with Comrade Kanokhidze of the Party General Secretariat; who works in with Comrade Mikojan directly in the Politbureau—compared with whom the Head of the Interior Forces in Moscow is a rabbit, and a remote subordinate of that Head far out East, by the name of Tretjak, a louse in a rabbit's fur. He smiled more sourly still, and whispered something close to the ear of Yakut. The comrade was an Apparatchik—someone somehow connected with the Apparat or Machinery; and if ninety-nine per cent of what those busybodies pretended was empty bluff—you never knew who had whose ear in consideration of what consideration; and might mention what to whom. Better not touch 'em.

Yakut said politely, "Of course, Comrade, if our men interrupted you in official business——"

The little man, white with anger, screamed, "I shall tell Mikhail Feodorovich directly."

The sergeant said, "The citizeness is still outside." At a nod of Tretjak's he let her in.

A very young woman, probably; though you could not be sure. She was wrapped in a military greatcoat one of the police must have given her. She hid her head in the upturned collar. All you could see of her was her legs, with thin stockings hanging about her ankles. She was wearing coarse but new shoes; the citizen who took her up outside the Camp gate earlier in the day when she was released must have brought them along. She was naked, probably, under her military coat, and had been made to wait outside; maybe it was only this that made her shiver. Shivering, hiding her face—yes, a young woman, her hair was now visible—she rushed across the hall, through people staring and stepping apart in silence, to the stairs—upstairs. Casting venomous glances about him, Comrade Apparatchik followed her. Up there, they disappeared.

There was still silence. Only one was left of the six. Yakut said, "Next."

He was interrupted. One of the men came in from the street and announced, "His Excellency the American has now left the train."

Tretjak, for the first time, mobile all of a sudden, quick-moving, shouted in an unexpectedly ineffectual voice, "*Pasha!* Get out!"

A scramble. The room was cleared in thirty seconds, but for the officials who put on their reception smiles.

Steps were approaching outside.

The last citizen caught in the raid and not yet screened was still standing there. He was very young, not much more than a child, with burning eyes in an emaciated face. He had shouted a welcome into a megaphone, in a foreign language, and now he was standing there, waiting his turn.

Tretjak noticed him. He shouted, "Get out!" Then he asked, "Who are you?"

The youth said, "Oh, just a Jew."

The steps outside had now reached the door. Two soldiers threw it open.

CHAPTER V

A TRUCK drew up outside the police prison a few hundred yards away, at the far end of Stalin Boulevard. Bebitz, Senior Specialist in the Department for Foreign Trade, stepped out and, past a guard of eight policemen, went towards the building.

He did not enter it at once. At the door he was accosted by a tall, bony woman who walked up to him in large, ugly shoes that clattered as if they had wooden soles. "Assistant Elementary Teacher Varbarova," she introduced herself. She was a spinster of forty-eight; a vegetarian interested in folk songs and digestion. She had a long face with a drooping mouth, and with a tendency to close her eyes while addressing you, conveying the atmosphere of a visit to the cemetery on November 1st. In fact, in spite of the differences in age, position, and feeding habits, she had something in common with Citizeness Borodina, the Commandant's wife—two dark Socialist sister angels or Soviet Norns, in charge of those lengths of thread that represent human fate.

She explained her position. Citizen Holobenko of the Press Trust being ill, she acted in purely journalistic matters concerning the local sheet as his substitute. Though she treated her journalistic calling with diffidence. Walking along by the side of the high official, she announced in a funereal voice: "I know, Citizen, I don't look like a journalist, but there it is. Generally I only write when there's a social event; a cultural Stalin something, or a funeral. Writing interviews isn't my business at all. It will be wrong, anyway." She stepped out by the visitor's side, with clattering soles, and looked at him mournfully, and said with a melancholy voice, "We are a small community here—that's how I'm going to start the write-up—'We are a small but Socialistically proud yet proletarianally unpretentious community up here on the heroic fringe of Stalinist eternal ice,' but we are not forgotten yet; sometimes the sensational breath of Marxist-Leninist world politics blows right up to us all the same." It will probably be the wrong way to start, anyhow."

They had by then reached the entrance hall and the lights. There

it could be seen that the official was a well-groomed man of about thirty-five, with a fine fur cap, a brand new, townishly black; heavily fur-lined overcoat, and long, extravagantly expensive gloves. His black hair, his short-clipped black moustache, looked as if he came straight from the barber's. He was well-groomed in an uncomfortable and unhappy way. He looked un-Russian somehow; un-Bolshevik; like a man suffering, having suffered a great deal; and yet he looked like waxworks, in his all too prosperous attire. He was on the alert all the time; not to be hoodwinked, not to be made free of, not to be belittled or ridiculed; and yet, you would not be sure if he had really just himself in mind, or something bigger than himself: an Office—maybe a Cause.

As he walked inside he talked to the citizeness. "No," he was just saying, "I shall go over to the hotel presently. We are all tired. We shall want some sleep. Because——" He interrupted himself, looking about in the vestibule, and said in an altered voice, "Is there nobody to receive me? I gave notice of my visit the moment the train arrived. Where is the officer responsible for this building? If this were not a district directly administered by the Interior Forces I should suspect an act of deliberate discourtesy and provocation."

• That last sentence was no longer addressed to the woman; it was addressed to the room at large, in irritation. Not with the Moscow pronunciation, incidentally; to Attona, come from the Ukraine, for instance, the voice seemed to have an even more Western tinge; Poland maybe, or one of the Baltic Soviet Socialist Republics. As he spoke, his angry and suspicious eyes went from face to face of the three, four, five men who, boot-clattering, had hurried in from somewhere at the news of his arrival. More, still holding the stage and uttering his reprimand, he stepped forward and shook hands—drily, impersonally, without a smile—with Attona and Borodin, who had rushed over from the hotel and were still breathless, with the head warder, a squat, pockmarked man with a short crop of reddish hair, and his assistant, a slow giant, and, for full measure, with the Citizeness Assistant Teacher Vatsarova as well, though they had already shaken hands two minutes before when they met outside.

With pad and pencil, she asked mournfully: "Now, what about the interview Citizen? What do I write?"

"Nothing," said Bebitz.

"Ah, the comrades of the press, it's always the same," Attona butted in gaily. "Having repeatedly contributed to our Ministry's journal, I am something of a journalist myself." He had been on tenterhooks ever since he took in the situation. "Citizeness," he said with a fat man's high-pitched voice, "I am Attona, the Sub-District Commissioner; every child knows me in Kolyma district, let alone the politically educated grown-ups, owing to my merciless Stalinist watchful eye on every—" Elastically, he turned to Bebitz. "You don't mind, do you, if I relieve you of this? Owing to my local experience— But just as you wish, Citizen, please yourself." He turned away and stepped aside, elastically pretending never to have tried it on.

There was a short silence. Then Borodin, in his too tight dress uniform, sweating profusely, said, "Comrade Senior Specialist, he is in there."

The head warder added, "We put him up in my private quarters. Obeying your orders. My wife had to move to the Communal Dormitory." He looked offended. He led the way.

They all followed, crowding into a narrow room that was barely six feet high. "We have split it," the man explained. Indicating a rough-and-ready short flight of wooden stairs rising into the ceiling, he added, "The prisoner Toboggen is upstairs. As ordered. Resting on our bed." He was furious.

His assistant said, "He has my civilian suit."

Borodin said, "The soldier who escorted him here is under close arrest, having treated the citizen without due consideration."

"Is he sleeping now, or what?" Bebitz asked, irritated.

Borodin said, "The orders were to give him what he wanted. We interpreted that to refer to victuals as well."

"And what did he want?"

There was a short silence.

"Vodka," the head warder said at last, stonily.

His assistant assisted him, "He has not moved for some time."

Bebitz's face grew pale with anger. Was he being ridiculed? He said, "Did he get my message?"

The head warder said, "It was given to him in writing, the moment it came. But he was asleep and couldn't be goused. Order

to be ready to be seen by Comrade Honoured Technician Ursula Toboggena." He looked about, as if to indicate that the absence of the Honoured Technician at least was not *his* fault.

His assistant said, "I have just been upstairs, Comrade Senior Specialist. The message is still on the table, unread. If you want me to go up and have another try to——"

He stopped. Some noise upstairs. A moment later they were all listening.

A bed creaking; somebody getting up heavily. The man was groaning, or grunting. He grunted an old sailor's song, in shreds and tatters, interrupted by muttered oaths. Yes, there was somebody getting up, out of a drunken sleep in a dishevelled bed, and groping for his garments and finding them and putting them on, one by one, while he was singing. The boots, too, no longer the sacking with the strips cut from old tyres—the prison warder's boots; good heavy boots.

"Getting up," Borodin said superfluously.

The man upstairs started moving about the room, still grunting his sailor's song. An obscene song, it turned out. The men downstairs listened stonily.

The assistant, the giant, said, "I put the message on the table, and the kerosene lamp is on, but he hasn't——"

But just at that moment the steps up there came to a stop, and a second later the song as well. They all listened silently. Then a groan came down; this time it was a groan. And a muttered cry, a word, three syllables, you could not make them out until the steps had woken up again, running, stumbling steps, stumbling towards the staircase, and now they had reached the stairs and he came down the stairs clattering. "Ursula," he said. "Ursula."

The sturdy civilian suit they had given him showed up the emaciation of his heavy frame even more terribly than the rags which he had abandoned. So he came down stumbling, wild grey hair framing his bony head. He was still holding the message as he stopped at the bottom of the stairs, looking about, wild-eyed.

"Citizen Toboggen," said Bebitz. "It is my task——"

Toboggen made a gesture, cutting through his sentence, cutting out greetings and introductions and everything immaterial. "Where have you got her? Ursula!" With fleeting steps—they stepped apart.

to let him pass—he reached the door to the vestibule, jerked it open and stepped outside. There was no light there now. “Ursulā,” you could hear him say out there in the darkness. He came back a moment later and slammed the door behind him and leaned against it, panting. “So you fooled me,” he said. “A joke.”

Bebitz said, “Citizen——”

There was again that gesture. “Who are you? I have seen your face somewhere, haven’t I? You are—— Ah, let me see. That young man—Bebitz.” He looked at the others, at their uniforms. You could see the spirit of his excitement welling out of him like blood oozing from the cut artery of a slaughtered beast. His face collapsed. “Who are these?” he asked, scarcely audible.

Bebitz said, “This is——”

“Sub-District Commissioner Attona,” the fat man helped him out.

“Sub-District Commissioner?” Toboggen whispered, staring at him.

“This is the Local Commandant,” said Bebitz.

Toboggen stared at him. He had started trembling. All of a sudden his teeth were chattering. It took him two minutes’ effort before he could speak again. He said, “I am not guilty.”

Bebitz asked, “Not guilty of what?”

Toboggen yelled, “I am not guilty! I am not guilty!”

There was silence.

Bebitz said, “The comrades will wish to leave us for a minute.”

They walked out silently.

The moment the last of them had left, life came back into the two men who stayed behind.

“Now listen——” Bebitz said.

Toboggen, a changed man, still trembling but struggling to unearth some last fragments of a human dignity that had for a long time lain smashed, shattered, trodden underfoot in a far corner of his humiliated and groggy soul, said at the same time: “Now, where is she? My daughter to come to me, it says in the message. I ought to have known at once that it was all a joke, or trick, or trap, what do I know—the moment they dug me out and dragged me here. Ought to have expected it, shock tactics, but I was asleep. Drunk, all right, I came by some drink after a long time, because—it isn’t

your business, young man. All right, because of my loneliness! No use telling you, you probably arranged that yourself, making them give me—— To shock and trap me. All right. Trapped. My teeth chattering. What more do you want? Here I am. I am prepared to confess. What am I to confess? Make it short, give me the papers. What do you want me to sign? I'll sign."

"You are misjudging me, Toboggen," Bebitz said. "My attitude to you——"

"Cut it out," said the trembling man. "Cut out your attitude to me. I remember you much better now. We had that before. Oh yes, my memory is still in working order. You told me of your attitude—when was it, at that congress, how many years ago? Cut it out; can't you see I am not in a state to argue with you? Look at me, I am trembling with fear of you. The only thing that—for a minute or two—kindles my desperate temerity to face you like this—I shall have to pay for it, I know. But I've said already I am prepared to confess whatever there is to be confessed. What more do you want? Torture me? You are torturing me already. I want to know, where is Ursula? How is Ursula? Where is she? You don't answer."

Bebitz said, "If you'd let me explain——"

Toboggen stared at him. "Dead, eh?" he asked very quietly. "Liquidated? Why? I haven't heard from her all these years, of course. It was a condition of—survival—wasn't it? I can't force you to tell me, but—— Administrative? Or was there a trial? Am I wanted because of whatever it may have been she did?" Quieter still, trembling heavily, he added, "I am—not very well, Bebitz. How did she die?"

Bebitz said, "I can see that you are in a bad state, Toboggen. I am glad there is no witness, the way you are talking. Except myself. Which does not count. You can rely on that. I take it on my conscience not to report you."

Toboggen stood there, trembling.

Bebitz went on, "As for the facts of the matter, Comrade Ursula Toboggena is all right, of course. In the best state of health. She was tired. She is outside in the truck, asleep."

"Under arrest, you mean," Toboggen said quickly. "Under arrest—why? Why the great company, the effort, the District man.

the Commandant, the head warder who looks like a killer? But if it were a matter of killing me—am I not one of the dead? How many deaths do you think I died these last fourteen years? So why do it all over again? What is there left to be killed in me? Why drag me here, why dress me up?”

He waited for an answer. As there was none, he went on, trembling, but it was his weakened, crushed, humiliated body that was still trembling; a cold anger crept up in him, the sudden rage of the exhausted, of the lonely, of the man who has not talked to anyone for a decade. ‘Beware!’ he would shout at himself, but there is no use trying to beware, he had been careful for too long. “Why drag me here, why dress me up?” he said, trembling with rage. “But I don’t intend to teach you your business. Rather, I taught you many years ago, I seem to remember, back in Esthonia, before I went to Moscow even. So how dare you, young man?”

He had started shouting. He sat down suddenly, and went on in a light voice: “I am not feeling very well. My stomach. Maybe you could have a look up in the room—but there won’t be anything left. Maybe you could tell the head warder, or better still the Commandant—they have some vodka here, I believe. He can send out for it, if necessary. A double vodka.” He stared at Bebitz, his wrath forgotten. “No? I see. Part of the technique. Was it myself who taught you? Withhold stimulants until the suspect has come clean.” He gave a short laugh. “And you really won’t grant Antoni Maximovich Toboggen a single vodka?” He finished, trembling with irritation, “And now come clean yourself. Stop shamming. Don’t forget whom you are talking to. Maybe I am dead. I am. A carcass, stinking by the roadside. But—I—am—History! I shall ask you for the respect that is due to me. What is going on, what are you up to, what is your intrigue?”

Bebitz said quietly, “What shall I tell you? You won’t believe me. Because it is simple.”

Toboggen looked at him. “Speak,” he said at last, raucously.

Bebitz said, “Zarotyn is coming over to Vladivostok, from Moscow, ostensibly to say farewell to a certain American.”

“Zarotyn?”

“Why, yes, Zarotyn. The Vice-Minister, Foreign Affairs.”

There was silence. Then Toboggen said quietly: “Bebitz, I have

not scan a newspaper for seven years." As the other man stared at him, he went on, almost apologetically: "In the first few years—yes, sometimes the official sheet. Or the wireless. But when they—when I moved farther out into the—wilderness— But it isn't at all bad. I have a—well, a house, all to myself. Sort of an igloo. Built it—here, with these hands, of course. They had grown—a little rough by then. I used to regret that, because—I am supposed to work as a doctor, really. Biologist, back in my young days—remember? Of course you do. It was brought up in the Case. I have a M.D., too. A—general practitioner—ought to have a little more subtle hands, with all fingers, really. But then, the trappers, hunters, nomads in the tundra and back there in the—great frozen forests—aren't very particular. Only, we don't really speak each other's language, you see. The news they pass on to me—for I haven't got a wireless. I applied for permission once, when war started, I think. Never got a reply. Naturally. They had other things to worry about. So the news I get is—shall we say?—a little fragmentary. There was a war, I know. We won it. Stalin. I know all that. But—details?" He nodded. "Zarotyn, Vice-Foreign Minister. There used to be a very young man called Zarotyn, a boy really, who— No, no, don't tell me. Details are probably irrelevant. Also, they don't interest me any longer. Just don't interest me. Curious, isn't it? Now, what—what was that you wanted to explain? Must I know? What—must I know?"

Bebitz said, "Wake up, Toboggen. You must wake up. Of course you must. Concentrate. I am going to say things as simply as I can. The Western Capitalist countries were our allies, this war. You know that? Good. The Americans gave us—Lend-Lease is the term. Financial support, industrial support rather. Most of it not to be paid for. Not out of generosity, of course."

Toboggen nodded.

Bebitz went on, "Nor was it in any way decisive. But now, the war scarcely over, with two-thirds of our industry a shambles, the Ukraine destroyed, every house, every factory to be built up again—now they have stopped. Come to a full stop. In spite of our—we implored them, almost. We must reconstruct! But they have stopped."

Toboggen nodded. "Of course," he said quietly.

"Of course. Only, we must get money from them. If they don't want to give it away—though why not? We won the war for them. But all right, let it be a loan. Do you get that? It is simple. That is point one. Now, point two is, that just in this situation—they had presidential elections, recently. And the man who won it sent the man who lost it over to us on a goodwill mission; that is their term."

"On a goodwill mission?" Toboggen had looked up.

"Yes."

You could see Toboggen's mind working; creakingly, unwillingly starting up like a rusty engine long neglected in a back-yard. His lips trembled awhile before they formed the sentence. "Where is he?"

"That's the spirit," Bebitz said encouragingly. "He is right here. He came up with us, or rather we with him. He is over at the hotel they have in this place. Sleeping by now, I suppose."

Toboggen's lips were still trembling. The engine had started up. Now he shook his head, shook it shakily somehow; it looked absurd. "No," he said, with those lips of his. "No—no—no."

"No what?"

"Whatever it may be. I don't know. Oh no."

"But, man, you don't know what I want to say."

"I don't want to know. Please, Bebitz. Whatever it may be. Leave me out of this."

"Shut up!" Bebitz shouted at him, flaring with anger. He controlled himself at once, seeing the man's wretched state. "Sorry, Toboggen. We just haven't any time to lose. You were famous once for your sober grasp of a situation, for the sobriety of your— Oh, no, don't believe now I am making a cheap joke, speaking of your sobriety. Let us be sober. We don't quite know yet what to make of this goodwill mission, although it is nearly over. Would Monopoly Capitalism send a man over just for the purpose of making friendly noises at us? It is so alien to our grown-up approach to serious matters that—! But then, they are not grown up. That is the most shattering discovery we have made in these years of wartime co-operation: they are on their way out, of course; but they are just not grown up! That—enigma—stands in the way of our sizing up this man Watkins, too. A fool, you would think at

some moments; but he isn't. He is no fool! So what is he after? Industrial espionage? They would do that on the quiet. They do do that on the quiet anyway. I shall spare you the whole course of our dialectical deductions—*my* deductions, for this is *my* case. I'm in the Secretariat for Foreign Trade. Here is my result. They expect us to ask them for a loan; we have not asked them yet! They are toying with the idea of granting it; ah, on their own terms, in their own interests. I needn't go into that. Sending over the antagonist of the President—that is eyewash. Teaching us Democracy! In fact, the man is a world-famous gold-mining expert. And there I am on the right track. They made an usurer's transaction before—taking Alaska in pawn for a loan to the Tzars. Alaska—and now they want Kolyma, here. Do you see their game now?"

Toboggen said nothing.

Bebitz roared, "Do you see their game now?" He controlled himself. "Forgive me, I am shouting. I am overworked. Because I have to do this single-handed, really. I have been holding the baby for three weeks now—attached to the distinguished guest. The responsibilities are mine. Our Foreign Secretariat are slow in following suit, as always. Now, of course, they will want to cash in on me, sending Zarotyn over at the last moment to clinch the deal. Never mind, never mind. What was I saying? A gold-mining expert. Do you see now why this man insisted on coming up here? And that is the point where you come in, Toboggen. I must get that loan for us. Well, say Zarotyn must get it—it is the same thing, really. The difficulties about such a loan—I don't mind confessing that in my opinion we should accept their terms. We could afford to accept them because we know that we can repay in, say, ten years. No forfeit as at Alaska, this time. There their dialectics are wrong. We must not be averse from pawning the gold mines of this country for a limited period. The real difficulties are at the other end. You know they are sentimentalists? They are. That is where you come in."

Toboggen stared at him. His lips were trembling into motion; you could not hear what he was saying.

Bebitz said, "There are sentimental stories afoot over there, spread by counter-revolutionary elements and Fascists. About our using forced labour to work the mines. About camps. Gross,

malicious libels. Alleging there are camps. Exaggerations about the one or two camps we have up here."

"One or two——?" This time Toboggen's question was audible.

Bebitz waved it away, impatiently. "Or three or four. Or fourteen. What do you want to tell me, what does it matter? Are there gas chambers, as the Nazis had? There aren't. I am not interested in details, they are no business of my Department. I want to get to the point. Their sentimentalists will be opposed to our loan if those rumours are not countered. They won't take our gold mines if—slavery is what the Fascist atrocity-mongers call it. The libel and absurdity of it. It must be countered, not factually—but atmospherically, as it were. Do you see that? Atmospherically. That is where you come in. Do you understand?"

Toboggen stared at him. And shook his head. And shook his head.

Bebitz said lightly, "On the occasion of these negotiations. That gave me the idea. As your old—well, pupil, admirer, why not admit that I was your admirer once, along with my whole generation? The idea—you are believed to be dead, Toboggen. Why not tell you? The counter-revolutionaries, and the Fascists abroad, and their so-called democratic press, spread the rumour—after that trial. After that trial of yourself and—those other men. What was the good of Toboggen confessing, and denouncing the crimes of those other men? They have been put to death officially, and he has been put to death on the quiet. Administratively. At once, or else up in their gold mines, where there is no survival, after a year or two, allegedly. Do you see now?"

"See what?" Toboggen asked, voiceless.

Bebitz said, "Those rumour-mongers will be utterly confounded—if the dead Toboggen turns up, as a kindly, silent, venerable negotiator on our side."

Out of a great silence, Toboggen asked, "And—my daughter?"

Bebitz said, "Oh yes. Comrade Ursula Toboggina. I keep forgetting that you don't know anything about her. How should you? Let me first of all put on record that the Authorities kept their bargain with you. The bargain was, if you confess in open trial your crimes as a counter-revolutionary wrecker—your own, and

of course those of your accomplices—not only your life would be spared, that would probably not have weighed so heavily with the great Toboggen, but—that was your condition, wasn't it? And the Authorities—well, maybe Comrade Stalin himself put in a word in your favour. Your condition that no shadow should fall on the life and career of your only child. It was accepted, and the bargain was kept. We always keep our bargains. How old was Ursula Toboggena then? A child. She is a young woman now. She got the most excellent education the Soviet Union can provide. Your being her father was never held against her, from the moment she——” He stopped.

“She disowned me?” Toboggen asked quietly.

Bebitz said, “You know very well that she had to disown you, publicly. A formality. Having been so brilliant at Talinn Academy—but I keep forgetting: you don't know. Well, from the Academy, the Comssomol sent her to Inner Mongolia, as you probably—— No? I thought the news sheets in this district must have mentioned it, but maybe it was not desirable at the time to say in print that technicians were sent out to Inner Mongolia.”

“Technicians?” Toboggen asked, scarcely audible.

“On loan,” said Bebitz. “The Comssomol sent her out on loan to the Inner Mongolian Comssomol. As a technician for Culture and Parachute Jumping. She had not yet got her pilot's licence then.” Toboggen nodded.

“Owing to her experience with the Partisans in the Hitlerite War,” said Bebitz. “She came back on holiday, and asked for a transfer to—— In fact it was I who arranged the transfer for her. Based on her cultural achievements as a linguist. The best interpreters' unit we have at the disposal of the Secretariat for Foreign Trade. When the American came—I am in charge of his journey, so to speak. His own interpreter—he brought one over—the man fell ill after a day or two, food poisoning or something, and so I made her his interpreter. Comrade Ursula Toboggena flew with him down to Stalingrad and back, and ever since—he prefers her to the other linguists. It is, possibly, of some little relevance, atmospherically. That is how I got the idea to——”

“To rope me in?”

“To rope you in. You wanted the whole truth; here is the whole

truth. That is how we come to be here. That is how you come to be here. To make your reappearance, on my own suggestion, on my own grave responsibility. And that is how Citizen Ursula Toboggena comes to be here. And as for her having fallen asleep out there in the truck—well, she has fallen asleep out there in the truck."

"Meaning that," Toboggen said, frowning with concentration, "—forgive me, I am not—oh yes, I am quite clear-headed, only you oughtn't to have refused me that refreshment. What was it I wanted to say? Sleeping out there in the truck. That means I can just step outside and talk to her?"

"I told you she is sleeping," said Bebitz. "She wants to sleep."

Toboggen nodded. He nodded many times.

Bebitz said, "What is the hurry? We shall see more of you. And you will see more of her."

Toboggen looked at him slowly, and asked, "And if I don't play?"

"That would be regrettable," Bebitz said lightly.

"I should disappear forever? You know I should not care any longer so very much. How much is there still left of me to disappear?"

There was no answer.

"No, not that?" said Toboggen. "If I don't play—I should not see her? Is that it?"

There was no answer.

Toboggen nodded. "Decoy," he muttered. "Using her as a decoy." He stood there, thinking heavily. "Did I teach you that?"

"Toboggen," said Bebitz. "Toboggen, I spoke of my former admiration for you, a minute ago, and that was wrong. I could speak of pity now, and that would be wrong again. Emotional luxuries. We haven't dug you out for the sake of luxury. Ours is a hard world. Get up. Get up."

Toboggen was sitting there heavily. "Who am I?" he said. "A chance survivor, by a freak of—endurance. A curiosity. Bebitz, Bebitz, why are you fighting me? Who am I, to be fought by you?" He put out his arm, a long emaciated arm with a maimed hand, in an entreating gesture. "Bebitz," he said in a very quiet voice, "let me see my child."

Bebitz said, "You know by now, Toboggen, that it is up to you."

Toboggen fingered the collar of his shirt. "Stifling," he said, getting up heavily. Heavy, staggering, he went to the window and threw it open. Darkness was outside. The blurred outline of a few houses. A waiting truck.

"I should hate to have to leave this conversation to Comrade Tretjak of the Ministry," said Bebitz.

The man by the window stood there trembling.

"We want you, Toboggen," Bebitz said quietly and urgently.

Toboggen said, "You won't let me see my child?" His teeth were chattering.

Bebitz shook his head.

Toboggen, all of a sudden, shouted, "Ursula!" He yelled, "Ursula!" Abandoned, unchained, an animal calling out in the dark of night, he yelled, yelled, "Ursula! Ursula!"

Bebitz, startled for a moment, hurried over to him, to restrain him, to drag him away from the window. He stopped halfway. A sound was audible from out there in the darkness, a girl's voice.

"Ursula!" yelled Toboggen, battered, desperate. "Ursula!" Bebitz had seized his arm; he shook him off, laughing into his face in the wild and powerless triumph of his desperation, trembling, and yelling, yelling.

Fleeting footsteps were outside. A moment later the girl stood in the room.

CHAPTER VI

THE veteran partisan of the Hitlerite war, the Honoured Technician of Moscow and Inner Mongolia, the Pilot of the First Grade and Organizing Instructor of youth movements, culture, and jumping by parachute, was a very young girl indeed; a chit of a girl, slightly built, fair-haired, with bright eyes, with the voice of a bell. Under a heavy fur vest, which she had unbuttoned, she was dressed in something resembling a girl guide's costume; with the ribbons of two war decorations pinned to her white blouse. She must have been sleeping; she was still drowsy with sleep as she came in running.

Toboggen seized her in his arms.

"Hullo, Father," she said.

He held her in his arms, close to him.

"Oh, I am so sleepy," she said, yawning. In his arms, she turned to Comrade Foreign Trade Department's Senior Specialist Bebitz with flaring eyes. "Bebitz, you are a cheat. I told you to wake me when you went in."

"And I told you," the Senior Specialist said cuttingly and wearily, "that I was not going to do it. I told you to stay in the truck until matters with your father were settled."

Toboggen held her so closely and desperately—all she could do was turn her head. "Aren't they settled?" she asked, puzzled.

Toboggen started laughing. There he stood, a heavy, dishevelled man, a big beast thrown out into the frozen forest and trapped again one hour before death; there he stood laughing, clinging to his child. "Everything is settled," he said in a loud, hoarse voice, and hugged his child, and turned this slim, fair, light being that by a miracle was his child, turned her right and left to look at her, to pat her, to kiss her hair. He laughed; tears were in his eyes, he laughed so much. "Everything's settled and all right," he exclaimed. "Ah, my child, and this—his young whipper-snapper thinking he can put you in the street outside the house and still keep us apart."

"Toboggen, Toboggen," Bebitz said quietly.

The laughter fell out of Toboggen's face. In a second he grew very pale.

Bebitz said, "Am I to understand that you see reason now?" And to the girl, "Will you please just a moment—" And to Toboggen again, "Are you now willing to accept instructions?"

The girl freed herself from her father's arms. She was now quite awake. "Oh," she said quietly.

Toboggen said in an undertone, "Listen, child—"

Her face had changed. She withdrew from him, one step. "Oh," she said, scarcely audible.

"There you are," said Bebitz. "I told you to stay in the truck until called—if called at all."

"You said," the girl answered quietly, "you said you were sure he would now be all right really, after—all that time." She looked at her father. "He is—there is still something wrong with him?" Her face closed. "Oh," she said. And to Bebitz, while she was slowly withdrawing to the door, "I am sorry. It was a private—I was moved. I was being emotional." From the door, she looked at her father. Sorrow was in her eyes. "Oh," she said quietly.

Bebitz said, "Will you now please return to the truck?"

— "Yes," she said in a whisper. She turned to leave. And turned again, and looked at Toboggen. Toboggen had started laughing.

Yes, his whole frame, heavy and brittle at the same time, was shaken by a huge laughter. "Ah," he exclaimed, trembling amidst bursts of roaring hilarity, "ah, have I fooled you, now, Bebitz? Own up to it! Did I lead you up the garden path, you little twerp, you little—? Ah, Ursula, come over here to your old father. Ai, I must sit down again. Look at this little—ah, at this little frog, this grasshopper coming along and— Me! Me, Toboggen! Ai, it hurts me I must laugh so much."

She took two quick steps towards her father, and stopped again.

Bebitz said quietly: "I am quite willing to give you some time to find—a new sense of reality, Toboggen. But this is in poor taste. Am I to take it—"

"Am I to take it," Toboggen aped him, with desperate eyes, amidst bursts of hilarity. "Look at him, Ursula. A young man wet behind his ears coming along and—" He got up, rugged and gaunt, and swaying but erect, and turned to Bebitz, and thundered.

"Sir, where were you in the October Revolution? I shared a room and bed with Comrade Lepin at a time when you dirtied nappies, sir."

The girl started laughing. "Bebitz," she said, "I've told you many times that you are a damned fool." She stepped up to her father and laid her hand on his arm.

Bebitz said, "I shall thank you if you will cut out personalities. If your father first misled me—if he really misled me—it was a joke in poor taste. A dangerous joke which is bound to raise doubts if the decision to call on him—was really justified. However, I am not narrow-minded. If he really sees reason——"

"I shall," Toboggen roared, standing there desperate and triumphant, with his child's hand on his arm. "I shall."

"You must forgive him, Father," the girl said. "He just doesn't know what is what. He never knows. Blind."

"Absurd," said Bebitz.

The girl said, "Blind. And you know it."

"There is a difference," said Bebitz, "between being blind to a situation and ignoring it. For reasons. You know we have reasons."

"Calling Mr. Walter M. Watkins a situation?"

"There are reasons," Bebitz said heatedly. "If I temporarily ignore——" He checked himself, and stopped.

"The—American?" Toboggen asked.

"Absolutely," said the girl. "He is gone on me. But this Bebitz here is just blind." She added, with a voice like a bell, "He sometimes behaves like a congenital idiot, biologically speaking."

Toboggen looked from one to the other. Roused, somehow, from deep down, in an altered voice, he said, "You two are—married? No? Engaged?"

"Yes," said the girl.

Toboggen's face closed. "Oh," he said quietly.

"I did not authorize you," said Bebitz, "to make public announcements." And to Toboggen, "What we want to know is if you play—yes or no. It is getting late. If yes——" His voice changed. Irritated with fatigue, he went on, "If yes—you will want to prepare yourself and come over to the hotel."

Toboggen looked at his child, and looked at Bebitz. "All right," he said at last, extinguished. He turned to the stairs heavily. At the

bottom, he stopped. "Coming up with me for a few minutes, girl?" he asked without turning.

Bebitz said, "She is busy."

Toboggen nodded. He started climbing the stairs, a heavy man, his back was bent, his feet were dragging. He was halfway up when he stopped again. "Bebitz," he said, without turning. "Back in Esthonia—I seem to remember you were married."

Bebitz said evenly, "My wife was killed, back in Esthonia, just after the liberation. To be exact, she killed herself."

Toboggen stood there on the stairs, turned away, listening. "After the liberation?" he asked quietly.

"She was raped," said Bebitz, "by liberating Soviet soldiers. Then she killed herself."

There was silence.

Bebitz said, "They were young soldiers, from a remote province. We have not had sufficient time so far to do all we want for culture in the remote provinces. In ten years, in twenty years, they will know."

Toboggen did not reply. Suddenly he went on climbing the stairs, with heavy feet, up to the other room.

Bebitz said, "Then she killed herself."

CHAPTER VII

THEY dodge," said Mr. Walter M. Watkins. "You see, Bob, that was what made me suspicious first: their dodge."

There was no answer. The room was dark. It looked like a parlour, not like a real room in a hotel. All rooms booked, probably. And a subtle hint to him too that he had better not deviate from the arranged schedule of his trip. Or else he'd have to put up with having to sleep in a parlour instead of a real bed. But they didn't know him. He was tough as nails! "Their dodges," he said aloud. There was no answer.

The large, tired, flabby man was lying on his back. He was fully dressed. When they let him leave the train at last, having kept him waiting for half an hour, and escorted him in here in procession, as if this were the top-ranking apartment in the Waldorf Astoria, or in the Gritti or the George the Fifth, he did not move a muscle in his face; just said, "Fine," and opened the belt and waistcoat. Breathing was easier that way. That itching too was probably connected with his state of health. His state of health had not been too good of late. But he staved off the idea that he might be seriously ill. It was an idea that had been crouching in some remote corner of his consciousness for some little time now, in fact ever since he lost that hectic election campaign back home. It was the only justification, or excuse, a self-respecting loser could decently think up for himself, unless he were to admit that he was growing old, and that was not an admission to be countenanced for a single moment. Their eyes would jump out of their heads at the airfield back home in Minnesota, and later again in Washington, when he came to shake hands with the President, with a few mutual back-slaps for the benefit of the press photographers—the eyes would pop out of their heads at his spectacular rejuvenation on this tonic jaunt right across the Communistic world. And now, boys, he would say to the press, now I'm feeling fine, and tomorrow morning I'll start all over again.

He was lying on a kind of divan. They had not given him any sheets. He had thought they might be underneath the cover, which

was made of canvas, quite a good soft of canvas really, nearly up to American third standard, with a quaint sort of embroidery which even to his vastly experienced eye looked almost like hand-made like they used to have in the olden days; they must have special machinery to get that effect, he must make a mental note to ask a question; casually, else they won't tell. But when he pulled off the cover, sort of grey cotton-wool was all there was underneath. And when he went lower still—Astonishing, he had said to Bob (to Bob Smith, his personal publicity agent whom he had taken along in lieu of a secretary—he had noticed at once when he talked to the Soviet guys back in Washington that to their mentality a secretary would be more acceptable), astonishing, he had said to Bob: look at this underneath the cotton-wool. Why do they want to hide their sheepskin vests? Why aren't we supposed to know they have them, is this a secret pattern?

He had replaced it all and had lain down at once. They had arranged a social reception for him, later in the evening. He could not refuse. But first of all he must have some sleep. He knew there was no use asking where the bathroom was. There is a tremendous potential market for all sorts of fittings, he would tell the Annual Conference of the Federation of Domestic Conveniences Manufacturers at Detroit next month, who had booked him the same day they signed a one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollar cheque for his campaign.

He had lain down and slept, and now he was awake again, itching all over. They had left Bob Smith in the same room with him, not even giving him a couch, just to rub in the lesson probably, but Bob said it was worth a thousand bucks to him—the humorous write-up he'd make of it for *Colliers*, or for *Life*.

"Bob," the man lying there on his back repeated, "you asleep; or dead, in that chair of yours? I say, what made me suspicious first was the dodge."

"It sure did, Walter. Now isn't that marvellous," Mr. Robert Connecticut Smith said, still out of his sleep, even a fraction of a second before he started out of it.

"Bob," said the man on the divan. "Switch on the light, Bob."

"No," said Smith, fully awake now. "I enquired from the Local

Commandant. They haven't got any juice for light, at night. Not in the rooms."

"No juice for light at night?" said the large man, wondering.

"What was it you wanted, Walter? Sort of sleepless? If you want to dictate, I got the battery travel lamp that manufacturer guy from Cambridge, Iowa, sent us to the airport the day we left."

He groped in the dark. Light shone. He put the lamp on the table. He sat down to it with pad and ball pen, a small, square-built man in a neglected town suit, rather blue, with rather strong white stripes. With it, he wore an American necktie of considerable beauty; a rose-coloured, airy mushroom was depicted on it, set against a greenish sky, and all along the fringe, in cute letters you'd think were Japanese, kind of Gook anyway, it said Atomic, Atomic, Atomic, many times. His only concession to the hardships of an Arctic trip was a heavy pullover, of the olive green type worn by U.S.A. officers. His strong, new, yellow chromium leather boots were bought in Moscow (at great expense, the day that his only pair of black town shoes in which he had started travelling gave out.) His face was pinched and buoyant at the same time, tired yet enthusiastic, presided over by a sharp nose and a pair of narrowly-set, shrewd, daring and yet lonely and exhausted eyes—the face of an American citizen who fifteen years ago at the age of thirty had missed the bus into prosperity, and had ever since been determined never to be older than twenty-nine.

"Shoot," he said.

Walter Mayflower Watkins, lying on his back, dictated in a soft sing-song rhythm that made a semi-precious stone of every single word, "Gentlemen, this is my little wish, I said to them; I put my finger on the map with closed eyes and the name under my fingertip reads Poshansk. I'll have to dictate a few letters today, but what about tomorrow morning; let's fly up to that place Poshansk; is that okay with you, gentlemen? And they said, of course; but what made me suspicious was their dodge. Of course, they said, but there is no air-strip up there to put down a decent plane. Only an industrial one-track railroad to carry the timber trade. So I told them, gentlemen, if you don't want me to go to that place Poshansk just say so; it is your right, but if you want it on record you let me go where I choose, you'll let me go to that place

Poshansk!" He interrupted himself and asked, "Did I or didn't I say exactly that to the bastards, Bob?"

Smith said, "You sure did, Walter."

The flabby man went on, "The reason why I insisted was to check their reaction. Was that guy Zarotyn from their Foreign Office coming from Moscow all the way over to Vladivostok only to see me off? Were they anxious for me not to delay my departure by making a little side trip up to this place Poshansk? If they wanted to be rid of me quickly—was this guy Zarotyn by any chance not just going to Vladivostok to see me off, but because he was expecting somebody else, coming over from the United States? Were they in touch with Washington directly, over my head, about whatever it may be, or had Washington contacted them? Was the President of the United States of America double-crossing me after all, with them directly, over my head and why? In short, who was kidding whom?"

He had dictated himself into an excited state, raising his voice as he went along; now he made a move to lift his bulk into a sitting position, but let himself drop back halfway; something was hurting him inside and no mistake. The itching, too. Tomorrow he would find himself come out with a rash. He turned his head towards the table. His face was caught in the light.

It was the face of a man who must have been astonishingly good-looking at the age of eighteen or twenty, when he was up at Yale, where he was supposed to do some athletics and prepare himself for entry into his father's law firm; the firm of Suckerbergh, Watkins and Lafayette, the big corporation lawyers prominently connected with the metallurgical industry. It was in connection with this connection really that he took an interest in chemical science, and carved out his career, in which at the age of thirty or thereabouts he had risen so high that there was not much left to rise to. At thirty-eight, he allowed himself to be persuaded by his business associates to go to Washington as a Senator, and at forty-eight he still stayed there, in a leisurely fashion. At fifty-six, they secured for him—foisted on him, really—a certain nomination.

The rest was history. He was not quite fifty-seven now. He had been a widower these last seven years, ever since Maisie, his third wife, crashed with her motor-car into that tree that time, up in the

Rockies, after the row she had with Rex Nero Prohaska, the ~~halalaika~~ crooner, who later eloped with Kid Schmalzapfel, the heiress, of the Schmalzapfel fortune, of United Meats. His son Asa P. Watkins, whom in a moment of absent-mindedness he had been weak enough to take along on this trip, was his only child; in fact, his only relation altogether. He was—how old was he again? Twenty-one? Really twenty-seven by now? He had taken after his mother, Joe Wackenbacker's daughter, who had been Walter Watkins's college love, and only love, come to think of it.

Asa P. had taken after her, and she had never been beautiful. But then, of his father's Yale athlete's countenance there was not much left either, but for those traces in his face as he lay there on the divan looking into the light. The hair still full, and preposterously curled like a Cupid's, over a broad, unhealthily yellowed and furrowed face. The brows too bushy, strikingly jet black, watching over large eyes that were heavy-lidded, strong-veined, and underpainted with pouchy shadows like those of an ageing Levantine or Italian. That applied to the body as well, an athlete's, long since grown soft and enveloped in layers of flabby fat; there was no dietitian, no beautician, no psychoanalyst, no Savile Row tailor, who'd ever manage to put it out of sight. A bulk of a man. A walrus of a man. A man like a tired power-house

"What was it again I was dictating, Bob?" he said.

Smith said, "About Mr. President 'Who is kidding whom?'"

"And who is kidding whom, Bob?" said Walter M. Watkins, looking into the light.

Smith said, "He may be kidding. But he who kids last kids best."

He was not so sure. The crack was his. He had used it on the posters, four months ago. He was not so sure, though. Before using it on W.M.W.'s election posters (having been hired as fourth publicity man and having been kept on the pay-roll when the others left), he had used it thirty-seven times in the last twenty years. When he got his first job, switching from local reporting for that Mid-Western paper to copy-writing for the local advertising agency; and when he tried to run his own firm with that kid's money until he went bust after a year or two; and when he went into the comic strip business—"Who's Kidding Who," that series,

sold to seventy-seven independent small-town papers and finally to the tabloids. It looked like the break at last but wasn't; but at least it got him the job in the end, publicity man for Macnamara's, the toothpaste guys, the famous poster, 'Who's kidding whom, Madam, are you kidding 'em with your White Teeth or are your White Teeth kidding you—He Who Kids Last Kids Best!'

It brought him the assignment for the election, just as his toothpaste contract was running out: Walter M. had bought the Macnamara interest, and took him straight into the campaign. And there hadn't been any lack of buoyancy, considering one was a forty-five year-old hack being twenty-nine all the time. And maybe Walter M. wasn't counted out yet and would keep him. But he wasn't so sure at all if he wanted to be kept. The band waggon was still running, but maybe this was the time to jump off. "He who kids last kids best," he said cheerily, stifling a yawn.

The flabby man said, "Go on, Bob, write." He went on dictating. "Accordingly, the rail journey was taken this day, in a primitive coach on a third-category rail-track. It made me reflect on the subtlety of those Russians, who by making me believe that their discomfort was invented, lured me into insisting on a trip which they must have known was going to get me into exactly the discomfort they had warned me of—thus trying to get me in the end to speed up my departure, which they knew I proposed to delay. Got that, Bob?"

Smith said, "You bet."

Watkins dictated, "What makes their tricky manoeuvre particularly suspicious is that in their effort to head me off from Poshansk they kept mentioning timber and never gold. It proves that they know full well that I had to give up my metallurgical interests and went into toothpaste. That transaction was so well camouflaged that it astonishes me to see the efficiency of their intelligence. It is evident that the United States of America are riddled with their spies. At the same time, it makes me reflect this time not on Mr. President but on my own political associates. They were persuading me to run for President so as to entangle me in a campaign which would give them a chance meanwhile to squeeze me out of the gold business. By putting me up, were they trying to hit the President, or were they hitting me? Never mind, I have

decided that the moment I step out of the 'plane in Minnesota I shall tell the world that I, Walter Mayflower Watkins, shall within five years make Macnamara's Tooth Paste into an Empire." He had raised his voice, he asked almost coaxingly, "Shall I do that, Bob?"

"You sure will," Smith said. "You sure will, Walter. You bet."

The tired man dictated, in a changed voice, "Those were the thoughts in my mind today, on the trip up. I am not generally given to descriptions of a poetical character at my time of life, but I can't help recording in this confidential memoir exclusively for my own use that in spite of the primitive rail-car the trip was a dreamlike experience, all the more as I left the other compartments to my companions and was sitting right next to the interpreter they have given me, and who has served me so well, this trip. My conversation with her reinforced the theory I am forming on this journey, and which I shall announce on return, *viz*: that our American philosophy of Equality of Races applies to these Asiatics as well. Years back, when as a younger man I made Polynesia, I discovered that the Polynesians, head hunters or no head hunters, are basically just shy. We just must make them trust us and the American way of life. My theory is that these Soviet people are basically like the Polynesians, really just subconsciously longing to be liberated from their shy hostility. Got that, Bob?"

"Yep," said Smith.

The tired man went on, "Regarding my interpreter, for instance—got that, Bob?"

He stopped. Mr. Robert Connecticut Smith looked up, and put down the pen. Dozing off, he thought. Something dropped on his white, harshly lit-up writing pad, from the ceiling. He looked closely. It was a beetle. He could observe a thin dark line, a procession of them, rising from the corner containing Walter M. Watkins's couch, up the wall, and coming over across the ceiling to a point right above his head, queuing like parachutists for the drop.

Walter M. Watkins lay there on his divan, tossing uneasily, and scratching. "Regarding my interpreter," he muttered, "regarding——" He started snoring.

Smith settled in his chair, and switched off the light.

The snoring stopped, with a single snarl. The man on the divan

said, in a clear, cool, sober voice, "Smith. I say, Smith. No, don't switch on, I am not dictating this. I want you to inscribe it in your brain, for later reference. Got that? Now listen. Two things. First, regarding the President. The past election campaign is past, to him as well as to myself. I got a beating. Right. I am going ahead, and he knows I am. When I told him I wanted his blessing for a good-will trip to the Soviet Union, I hoped he would refuse. It would have given me the progressive vote, next time. He knew, that's why he went out of his way to agree. Got that? His reckoning is, if my trip is a success, he is going to claim it as his success. If it is a failure, it will be my failure. I am telling you the secrets straight from the bottom of my heart. Therefore, the trip must be a success with a personal twist to it that he can't claim. Logical? A scoop. Right, call it a scoop. Why am I delaying departure? Why am I going up here? Out of a sentimental interest in the city of Poshansk? And why did I go down to Stalingrad, and up to—what was the name of that place where they live in log cabins with just one skyscraper in the centre? Was it Yakutsk? I tell you these Communists were sick and tired of my good will after a week really. So why do I keep hopping about right and left? Because I am nobody's fool. I must have my scoop. Got that? Right. That is number one. And now inscribe this in your brain. Number two. They are trying to sell me something. They fiddled it to make me fiddle it to come up here. They are kidding me by making me believe they kidded me the other way round. It's got something to do with gold. Therefore, they don't know I am out of gold, and in toothpaste. Therefore, who is kidding whom?"

He dozed off. After a minute, or five, or ten, he said softly, "Bob. Have they found a decent room for the interpreter, Bob?"

Smith said, "The interpreter sleeps in the room opposite."

"Good," Mr. Walter M. Watkins said. And asked, "Did you give her my note?"

"The note," Smith said, "and the parcel. It is all we had left. She wasn't in, Walter, so I put it on her bed."

"Good," Mr. Walter M. Watkins could be heard muttering. "Good."

After ten minutes, or five, he said, "Bob Smith. I know what is going on behind your forehead. You're toying just a little with the

idea of selling out on me. Don't. I am up, and coming, Smith. Do you hear? Up and coming, at not yet fifty-seven. I say, Smith, do you hear?"

He listened. Smith, in his chair, was snoring, hardly perceptible.

The large, flabby man on the couch said to the silence, "Ursula Toboggena Good night, Ursula Toboggena." He too was snoring a minute later

The parachutists, in a long file, invisible in the darkness, had turned in their tracks—back across the ceiling, down the wall, into the kapok.

CHAPTER VIII

SCHWANNEKE, or Comrade Schwankov, as he would like to hear himself addressed, a former German prisoner of war released from Camp for his high merits of an informative nature, and force-settled along with his deaf twin brother at Poshansk, is in the act of paying a visit to another force-settled personage, in his cabin, down Stalin Boulevard, second to the left, where after a hundred yards it hits the swamp. It is a highly comfortable dwelling, built in pioneering days five years ago from larch tree branches to last three months, and lo, there it is still standing, and if you but put enough rags and old newspapers into the crevices of wall and roof there is little draught, provided there is little draught outside. The meritorious ex-prisoner balances a cup of very hot, very black, one hundred per cent genuine chicory coffee in his huge hand, in a refined posture, keeping his little finger stretched far away; and between manly and smacking sips he has a conversation with his host, Citizen Wojcechovycz, a large man of late middle age with melancholy eyes and a large, black, drooping moustache, which he lifts with his left hand whenever he wants to take a sip from his coffee-cup. His good lady, whom he has picked among female camp releases a year ago, has gone out and left him to his own devices in the preparation of the black brew, but here it is all ready, the visitor is welcome according to the tenets of old-fashioned Polish hospitality. Also, Wojcechovycz has taken a liking to him at once.

"And then," he is just saying, sadly-monotonously, "then the Germans said, are you a Volksdeutsch, so I said of course I am a Volksdeutsch. So they left me my farm. But then the Russians would not leave me my farm if I am a Volksdeutsch, so why should I be a Volksdeutsch if I am a Pole; but then the Russians didn't leave me my farm because I am a Pole—never mind, Pan Wojcechovycz, if you are a Pole or a Volksdeutsch, you aren't an Ukrainian. So you go out East anyway, all right you are a Pole so you are a Pole; it means you leave behind every cup in the kitchen, the cow, the plough, everything; in Lvov they'll tell you just where to go to get a farm twice as good. So I left my farm, twenty-three acres outside

Bialystok, and then in Lvov——” Sad-eyed, he lifted his moustache with his left hand and took a long sip; it sounded melancholy-monotonous.

Citizen Schwankov said, “Bialystok, ha. Known to me. Nasty population there. You had the greatest difficulty at Bialystok, keeping up the morale of the troops. At Bialystok sometimes you just had to make an example of somebody of the hostile population. That’s your Bialystok for you.”

“Yes,” said Citizen Wojcechovycz, “and at Lvov, all right, Pan Wojcechovycz, you just move on East in this cattle truck with bars all round; there’ll be a farm for you; so I say where, this side of the frontier of Europe or the other side the frontier of Europe? So they say, better the other side. So I say where’s the farm? I want my farm written down on a paper; so they laugh, and write up from what they call—do you know maps, that’s what they write it up from, this place here, on a paper; and I say what’s the name of the farm, I want the name of my new farm, so they write up—— Wait,” the citizen interrupted the melancholy flow of his report to get up, heavy-footed in his high farmer’s boots, and fetched a piece of paper from the shelf. “Here,” he said. “That’s what they write down. Once they bring you there, you just go to the local Party Secretary’s office with this paper and say you are the new proprietor. Name of Sewage Farm. So they bring me here all the way——” He stopped. He did not continue. His sad eyes were somewhere far away.

Citizen Schwankov too is seized by the autobiographic urge. Out of the inner pocket of his bulging jacket he produces his bulging pocket-book. The transparent holder in which he used to keep his National Socialist Party card has been empty for some time, but he has kept his pay-book (*Unteroffizier, Waffen S.S.*, civilian profession: Family Butcher’s Assistant, age: thirty-six, character: Keen and Showing Initiative, also Race Conscious, decorations: Iron Cross Second Class). Other articles at one time lodged in this pocket-book he has again discarded, *viz*: a three-cornered small sheet of paper bearing a serial number and a hieroglyphic sign, attesting for him who is in the know that the bearer was a member of an organization called Werewolf, which will not allow a single foot’s width of German soil to fall to Russian Sub-man and/or

Plutocratic America and Perfidious Albion, whichever the case may be; furthermore one German demob. slip, faked; one Polish food card, faked; one Russian prisoner-of-war's camp release pass, faked. But then again he has preserved four delousing certificates, genuine; also a letter reading,

My Sweetest, why, oh why have you not coming to the Appoint. which I waited you two hours outside of the Cinematograf I can only explain your Butcher Widow that fat one keep you on a chain to her petticoat which I know she wears I have seen it last Christmas celebration in the Hotel Warsaw in the lady toilet which no real lady with modern philosophy wear a petticoat but you oh pfui chained on it so I can only spit out with contemptuousness oh my Sweetest come 9 o'clock to the room, if you not come I am so Lonely and probably Pregnant from your persuasion & promises I jump in the river where she is deepest and a letter to the Police your real name I am just joking so you will see you must come at 9, signed

With x x x x x x x x x x x x.

Jadwiga Kysz, which you got acquainted in the Advertisement and persuaded Everything.

Also, carelessly (but he would not part with these documents, heroically he kept them hidden in discreet places all through the times of danger), a letter reading,

Dear Herr Kamerad,

Thank you for sending your two poems "To The Führer" and "To The Moon", which I herewith return because The Waffen S.S. Man has stopped publication owing to the Regime of our Forces, signed,

With True German Greet and Handclasp,

The Editor.

And finally one sheet of the German Courier in Poland newspaper, folded.

It is this sheet to which Schwankov now turns. He unfolds it on Wojcechovycz's table; it carries a photograph of himself in German N.C.O. uniform, with several other soldiers posing for

the photographer grouped round a civilian, 'who in front of his chest carries a placard bearing the words, "Thus we Punish Spreaders of Alarm and Despondency". The civilian tops the military gentlemen by a head, though he keeps the said head tilted sideways, but then again on closer inspection it turns out that his oddly heavy-looking boots do not quite touch the soil

Citizen Wojcechovycz looks over Citizen Schwankov's shoulder admiringly, respect fills his heart for a visitor whose effigy far over West, back in Atlantis (but this is not his expression) has hit the picture columns of the public press, yes, there you can see him taking a hand in an important event, a langing "Yes, there he hangs," says Wojcechovycz and laughs a little, his own sorrows forgotten for a moment

"It had to be done as an example, to strengthen the discipline," says Schwankov, proud yet modest

"Yes, discipline must be kept up," consents Wojcechovycz.

The guest, still scanning the picture, says, "Singlehanded too. It's the training does it, if you are used to stringing up an ox."

The host nods consent many times, he too knows what it means to string up an ox, at the farm he always had to take the man to lend him a hand; yes, those Germans are clever ones, and that was back at his own farm, and now tears rise to his eyes, his farm gone, this life is not worth living, but such a German would string up a man all alone.

Citizen Schwankov, replacing the proud picture in his wallet, says, "First they print you in the newspaper and all, and then what do you get out of it? War crimes Is discipline a war crime? So there. But they—oh no You must leave behind a widow with Family Butchery and Delicatessen too, my word of honour, four windows in the best situation, believe it or not, and the widow too, such breasts, I am not exaggerating, and you ought to have seen her in bed. But no, you must leave it all, only because of the Reds and the Jews and the Police and the Communists and the Poles and the Reds. What do you want? Peace Settle down. You aren't interested in them any longer But they—oh no. They haven't got a human understanding for you, they pick you up at the last moment as a war prisoner, though of course now I have changed completely and am a convinced Communist."

Vojcchovyca is greatly moved. Yes, there is much misery in the world, a man losing a delicatessen just because he is for discipline, and others again they send to sewage farms. "And who is responsible?" he says aloud, filled with brotherly feelings. "The Reds is responsible."

The other Citizen Schwankov, the deaf-mute, is leaning outside the entrance of the hut, whistling. He cannot hear what he is whistling, but it is beautiful.

CHAPTER IX

Tretjak said, "The man who flew the plane?"

"Prison," said Yakut. "Will die if not transferred to hospital. Sergeant hit too hard."

"He speak?"

"Mongol," Yakut said. "All he said Russian was——" He hummed through papers, scowling, in the light of the single candle that lit up Tretjak's room. "All he said was, 'Gold for America.'"

Tretjak said nothing.

Yakut, from another paper, said, "The old Jew. Kept for analysing. He was in Nazi camp. Why didn't they gas him? He does not explain."

"Next?"

"The Apparatchik. Been talked to by myself. I said, the Interior Forces have not interrupted him. It was orders by Senior Foreign Trade Specialist Bebitz, not the Interior."

"Next?"

"The man Senior Specialist Bebitz summoned from the forest has been permitted by Senior Specialist Bebitz to leave prison and come here to the hotel. Without first asking us."

Tretjak said nothing.

Yakut said: "Citizeness Toboggena is the daughter of that released prisoner. Received a parcel from the American, but has not yet seen it; it is still closed. Inside is a hat."

"A hat?" Tretjak asked, frowning.

Yakut said, "A hat."

They were both speaking in an undertone, not moving their lips. After a long pause, Yakut went on, "Re the maypole here outside the hotel, a casual question has been put to Local Commandant Borodin. This one too has been erected by prisoners. The Commandant admits that he permitted it. When told casually that it is the same type of maypole we find everywhere, he pretends he does not see anything sinister in that fact. When asked casually why so much resin has been rubbed over it, his answer is, 'I suppose

because of the climbing.' Contents himself with supposing." He added, "Also, the main electric cable goes through his Camp, which is forbidden, because of danger of wastage of electricity." There was a long silence.

Tretjak said, "Cable through the Camp?"

Yakut went on, scowling, not moving his lips, "Re the festival cultural activity organized in honour of the American by Cultural Worker Borodina, a conflict has arisen between her husband, the Local Commandant, and Local Party Secretary Citizen Gorbakov, manager of the Staprodisc, who explains his absence from the reception of the foreigner with a sudden diarrhoea, owing to fish."

He thumbed his papers, and went on, "Re the provision of musical instruments, the following words were exchanged. Local Party Secretary Gorbakov said, 'No, Borodin, the instruments were originally provided for the brass band of the Party Fire Brigade. If the Party Fire Brigade brass band was in the end dissolved and the instruments loaned to the Prison Camp Guards' Polyhymnia, dialectically a loan still remains a loan. We shall start ~~the~~ Fire Brigade brass band again some day, perhaps next Stalin's Birthday, and that cultural activity comes under the Local Party Secretariat. Therefore I have to be asked each time the Prison Guards' Polyhymnia wants to use the instruments, and this time my answer is No.' On that, Borodin replied to Gorbakov who was in bed, 'I warn you, Comrade. You know very well your Fire Brigade brass band was dissolved on suspicion of playing counter-revolutionary music. Requisitioning the brass, by the Camp Guards' Polyhymnia, was a revolutionary act.' On that, Gorbakov shouted, 'A man who backs up stealing by borrowing, only for the vanity of his wife, is not fit to be a Camp Commandant.' On that, Borodin shouted, 'You want to ingratiate yourself with the Comrades Excellencies our visitors, by preventing the music and making a speech instead.' On that, Gorbakov hissed, 'Ridiculous. I never make speeches when I have diarrhoea. I refuse the brass. I refuse the brass.' On that, Citizen Borodin said something obscene, an uncultured invitation, contrary to Marxist-Leninist principles."

Yakut had read it, scowling, not moving his lips, in an undertone. Tretjak said, "You can go."

CHAPTER X

FOR Mr. Asa P. Watkins, the dialectics of his position were clear as the light of day. It was only a question of how to act.

Leanness had come naturally to his lanky body. There had never been a suggestion that he looked the overfed, pampered Monopolist-Capitalist, back in the United States. In fact, his Cell had scarcely ever had any objection to putting him into the fore; that time they picketed the White House, for instance; or that time they summoned him to New York especially—he had to borrow his father's private plane without his father's knowing, to be there in time and carry that sandwich-board through Madison Square Gardens so as to be among the arrested. There was nothing wrong really with his relations with the leadership. Also, they had not objected to accepting those little sums. Not objected at all. What grieved him was that they never let him speak to the Masses, really. He had tried. Realizing that a certain coolness in the reception accorded to him that day in Harlem was due to his dress, he had made an appropriate exchange (with that young dark-skinned comrade, a being of great gifts and the grace of a classical athlete reborn from a Hellenic frieze—the one who after a week at his flat so disappointingly left him, taking along the contents of his personal linen chest). But it turned out not to be his way of dressing, nor did the elimination from his speech of long words (those conceits of an upper class flaunting its ill-gotten privileges of education) make any difference. Surely, the Masses could not hold it against him that he stammered a little—which in his case, as his analyst explained, was the symptom of an unusually interesting secondary Oedipus complex all by itself?

There were compensations, to be sure. His relations of friendship with that young Italian pirate were cloudless. This Italian had the profile of a pirate; some Conquistadore must, unknown to him, have been among his ancestors; by profession he was a waiter. That spring trip last year by the two of them down South in Asa P.'s 1st car, to study the conditions of the Poor Whites and embark on little careful propaganda, would remain memorable in many ways.

What really rattled in young Mr. Watkins's memory was the attitude of the Party on the occasion of his father's election campaign. They had encouraged him to furnish certain data; even a letter or two taken from a private file. He was quite ready to play a not insignificant part in an Anti-Walter M. Watkins Campaign publicly. And then, no such campaign materialized, and he was whistled back. With some emphasis. Rudely almost. No questions being answered. He felt himself even driven to putting certain questions to Mr. Walter M. Watkins directly, and had been outraged by a silent, answering grin. His father must have coerced the Party into submission, some way or other, probably by means of some utter brutality! It led to an estrangement—unilaterally at least; it was the son who was estranged and scarcely accepted his monthly cheque—and there was no reconciliation really until the day the old man, beaten meanwhile by his antagonist, consented to take Mr. Asa P. Watkins along on his journey to the Soviet Union.

A disappointing journey, to be sure. Not as to Soviet reality; everything was there, just as described in the books, naturally. The country, still smarting under the wounds of war, was recovering. The people, bright-eyed, upright and admirable, were raising their standard of living visibly. Food was plentiful. Prices modest. Shops well stocked. On his father's request, they had been taken to the Law Courts, and though proceedings were too complicated to be translated really, it could be seen that justice was meted out impartially. One only needed to look at the judges to see that they loathed injustice and were incorruptible.

And there were no restrictions, they could go where they liked, they were never watched or even accompanied, except at their own request or else out of courtesy. That time down in Destroyed Stalingrad, one great imposing and tragic wilderness of rubble without a trace of humanity—and their guide saying, Gentlemen, turn wherever you like, alone, I shall meanwhile stay here for twenty minutes and refresh myself! Irrespective of all the industrial secrets and all that, whatever they may be, in the destroyed, completely unguarded factories. Gentlemen—wherever you like!

Or in that museum, back in Moscow. Go where you like! In spite of their knowing that he had acquired a smattering of their language in those evening courses arranged by his Cell three years ago,

so as to be able to read Stalín in the 'Original; a firm purpose finally abandoned only owing to a certain reluctance by the pirate to join in the effort. Gentlemen—where you like!

They had even taken charge of his colour-photographic camera, he being an indifferent photographer, and had made all sorts of photographs for him to take home, and he was absolutely sure that they would return the camera in the end in a better state than it would have been had he done the photographs himself. So much about their alleged lack of technical skill and honesty. Gentlemen—wherever you like!

It rather contrasted with the surveillance that man Smith, his father's lackey, foisted on him, on orders obviously, thus actually preventing him so far for three weeks from having a single unguarded conversation, between comrades, with the Russian comrades. Several efforts had remained abortive, solely owing to that man.

It was, at long last, an opportunity sent by Socialist Providence—unless the Russian comrades subtly arranged for it—that Smith was put into one room with his father, while Asa P. was given the upholstered seat in this ante-room. Comrade Tretjak's chamber was right next door! He had rather looked out for an opportunity to talk to the Assistant Head, Interior Forces, Eastern Section. He somehow did not very much like that Citizen Bebitz; he was too Western; Comrade Tretjak was vastly more Russian. Asa P. Watkins was weighed down by the duty to make a certain important communication. Also, the wish for a conference was reciprocal: the American comrade would have had to be of little perspicacity to overlook the signs. Comrade Tretjak, having talked to several people in there intermittently (intermittently he was asleep), had come out twice, each time looking at the American fully and earnestly, before he turned back to his chamber; and now, at the third occasion, he was not turning back at all, but after yet another full glance—all Russia, the whole of Soviet Democracy was in that glance—he walked straight on, out through the back door, into the night! Asa P. Watkins understood. He rose jerkily. His moment had come. He followed the Head of Far Eastern Security at once.

Now, as the high functionary had discarded his all-embracing

greatcoat, he could be studied at leisure. He wore the discreet uniform of his Service; discreet, that is, but for his shoulder-pieces, which were of course gold-braided according to his rank. He was a sturdily built man of medium height, with a shaven skull; On a severely economical, strikingly short nose he wore steel-rimmed pince-nez, the pince-nez of a myopic, magnifying his small, pale blue eyes—an office man's—to disquieting prominence. His square cheeks were now painstakingly shaven, his very small mouth was severely set and not given to utterance. You would have thought him to be a pessimist, if that were permissible in so high an official personage, and not too private an emotion altogether. Or was it just that he was of the sedentary, dyspeptic type? He looked as if he were cut out of stone; out of one of those fattish, softer stones; maybe not jade, after all, but cheese; a stout, dry cheese, indestructible and inedible.

As he walked out, without turning or, like the trained security functionary he was, otherwise betraying any sign of his subtle understanding with the foreigner, Asa P. Watkins could observe the awe- and yet confidence-inspiring squatness, the squareness of his aspect in reverse: square head, square neck, square shoulders, the square behind. Foreshortened by the longish tunic, even the legs seemed square as they moved steadily out into the darkness.

As Asa P. stepped out after him, he had some difficulty in finding his man, until he discovered that he had stopped in the entrance of the outdoor convenience, ten yards or so from the house. It was of the communal variety, seating six; and of the flush type; of the air-flush type, to be more exact. And it struck Comrade Tretjak's interlocutor-to-be at once that the Specialist had chosen the place with skill and subtlety: under cover; not easily overlooked; while in turn overlooking the approach. Privacy was secured for their *tête-à-tête* in an exemplary and straightforward fashion, while, with the inexorable dialectics and practical sense of a Socialist community, an economical use was made of time—of one of those little intervals in other countries mostly lost and indeed regarded as expendable. To Asa P., it was a revelation.

Needless to say that, with his quick wits, he joined in the scheme at once. The important conversation that ensued was facilitated by the fact, here disclosed for the first time, that the American's

stammering of the Russian language was matched, to a degree, by the Russian's knowledge of a good number of English words, which he used forcefully.

Asa P. Watkins said, "I am grateful to you, Comrade, for granting me this interview. I suppose the Comrade Teacher in that Moscow elementary school I visited with my father did after all understand my hint correctly—I was prevented from being explicit, of course—and reported to your Department. Or did Comrade Ike Soames write to you after all, to introduce me? He is our Agitprop man, in our local organization."

It was of course the appropriate thing for the Specialist not to answer those questions at any rate; they referred to the sources of information available to the apparatus of the Ministry, and were quite inadmissible; Asa P. realized that only too well himself, a moment later. He went on more quickly, and quite without stammering, "You're all overrating him."

"Which?" This time the high functionary had reacted, in almost impeccable English. In the dim illumination—dim but adequate in consideration of time and place—the American could observe him looking across searchingly, but inscrutably.

"Him," Asa P. said harshly. "Mr. Walter M. Watkins." He went on with an unstammering eloquence that astonished no one more than himself, "You overrate him; his importance, I mean. He lost the election and knows in his heart of hearts, subconsciously, you know what I mean, Comrade—that he has lost for good. He might as well hang himself, I mean metaphorically, Comrade, with his whole political and economic outlook, or commit some similar act of self-eradication—but I am certain, Comrade, that this is as self-evident to yourself and your great Organization as to me. After all, both you and I think with the inexorable logic of the trained dialectician, in the Marxist-Leninist sense. I should not have encroached on your precious time and suggested this conference merely to dwell on the *a priori* dialectics of his situation, Comrade. But what is probably not fully appreciated here, as I can see from the lavish and indeed undeserved hospitality and consideration accorded to him, is that his journey is a purely private affair. He told the President he was going to the Soviet Union, and the President slapped him on the back. Had he told the President he intended to

take a trip to New Zealand, the President would have slapped him on the back and would have said, 'All right, good luck, go to New Zealand, for all I care.' "

"New Zealand?" said the Specialist economically.

"Why, yes," said Asa P. "To New Zealand, or to hell."

"To hell?" That was again the high functionary, looking at him hard.

Asa P. said ruthlessly, "An Urias mission."

The functionary's reaction to this subtle disclosure was little short of startling. After a long silence, devoted no doubt to thinking out, flash-like, all the implications of that important intelligence, he said one word, in Russian. He must have realized that his confidential interlocutor did not understand; he repeated it several times, in—justifiably—growing irritation. In the end, however, he remembered the English equivalent. "Paper," he said peremptorily.

Of course. How could Asa P. Watkins have hoped to embark on this interview without proper documentation? After all, anybody might pose as anybody, in this life-and-death struggle of two worlds. He took out his wallet with his papers. "My passport," he said, presenting it.

"No," the Comrade shook his head energetically.

He ought to have known, thought the younger man. Having been addressed as Comrade, the comrade wanted of course to see his Party Card. Mr. Asa P. Watkins said, "I am of course a C—of course a C—Communist, but technically I am not a P—Party member but a P—a P—Po—a Poputchik—a Recognized Fellow Traveller."

It was a shame—shaming for himself, of course—that they had never enrolled him officially. Feverishly he went through the papers in his wallet. There was only the choice between two.

The first read,

My dear Mr. Watkins,

Our acquaintance in the bar of the Waldorf on my birthday caused me an unquiet night, in which the charm and wisdom of your conversation, on politics and all those other matters, lay under my pillow like rustling silk and did not permit me to close an eye, so much so that in the morning a being generally observant of my appearance (though not,

a friend) asked me what was the matter—whence all these black shadows? I feel more inclined today to believe that you are politically peculiarly right—particularly if certain prerogatives are granted to the Idea of Beauty—a theme which I feel urged to discuss with you in greater detail before I can say that I share your opinions and convictions completely. Shall we say, tomorrow at 7 at the Waldorf again, at the same spot where you drew my attention to my having dropped my handkerchief?

Yours in sincerity,

Albert de Couilly.

P.S.—Please disregard the perfume of this stationery. I am using it in memory of a being once dear to me

Was this, Asa P. thought, was this a suitable documentation to show to Comrade Tretjak as a proof of the addressee's politico-propagandist alertness wherever he went? Or should he rather choose the other, which read,

Dear Asa,

The guy brings you this is caled Scowly Belano he borrows your diner jaket for a day, the one with tails on, also shoe and tie and ett. because he appears in Court tomorrow morning 11 a.m. and the Party decides he must look a perfect gent from the 40 Club so the Court sees he cant have done it.

A mere small scrap of paper, and in the Cell Agitprop man's highly individual style; but was it not an even more forceful proof of his Party affiliation than the other document? Asa P. was faintly astonished to see that, among the two proffered documents, Comrade Tretjak unhesitatingly plunged for the larger one. A moment later, he was no longer astonished. The high functionary disappeared inside. An economic system still struggling with the problems of post-war scarcity would of course be bent on turning commodities to double use; just as in the case of time.

He blushed deeply. Not only because he had again been stammering at a decisive moment. He had been privately attached to that particular document, which was now lost. Let alone the fact that he could have obliged the comrade more effectively, out of

a discreet hip pocket store of that self-same commodity, in a variety, specially manufactured for the purpose by an economic system staving off the otherwise inevitable slump by means of a desperate over-production of consumer goods. The high functionary, however, was by then no longer visible.

Had he stayed, a search of Comrade Tretjak's in his own pockets would have proved unrewarding. Apart from such papers and documents of greater or lesser relevance to the community as he kept on his desk, in his attaché-case, or back at Khabarovsk in the larger or lesser safes, archives, and depositories of the Ministry, the high functionary owned, as an item of private property, merely one notebook which he carried in his pocket.

The notes therein, on one page, read, Novotossiysk, Pugachov, Dolna, Khabarovsk, Tukachenskoj, Indigulka, Magadan, Molotovgrad, Vladivostok, Brem. It was headed, Towns which are Known to Me.

Another page, without heading, read, Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin, Mikojan, Shtsherebrostchef, Golubkin, Schmelzer, Pirotka, Balunkovsky, Fedor Vladimirovich Papagenov our Local Party Secretary. Though there was no heading, the page carried an explanatory footnote: Rank Order of Thinkers.

Another page contained a register of years and months, and dots against them; one dot, three dots, no dot, no explanation.

The last page was headed, in a neat, very small hand, embellished with flourishes. Comrades Eligible for Matrimony. With clean vertical and horizontal lines drawn in advance, it provided for the registration of such particulars as Name, Background, Figure, Hair, Feet, Other Physical Characteristics, Other Moral and Political Characteristics.

That was where the matter rested. No name was inscribed in the register. Comrade Tretjak was a man alone.

Owing to the confidential relevance of the information contained therein, the notebook would have been quite ineligible for another purpose; let alone the size

CHAPTER XI

When Mr. Asa P. Watkins turned back into the house, in the dim light of the deserted corridor a large lady, whom he did not readily recognize, lay in wait for him. But yes, this was the Local Commandant's wife. Her bosom was heaving. Stepping up to him closely, she whispered, "Citizen Watkins, is there any danger for my husband?"

Scent was about her. He did not think so, said Asa P., blushing as he noticed that again he was stammering. He did not generally harbour any particular emotional regard for women but—how noble, he could not help thinking, how noble and truly comradely of her to worry. Would Mrs. Watkins—any of the late Mrs. Watkinses—ever have worried about Walter M.? What sort of danger should there be anyway? Why should these honest Soviet citizens worry so much about a visit by an unsuccessful American? He had thought of that particular American more than once, in more than one respect, in an unfavourable light, but—dangerous? How could he be dangerous? "No danger for the Citizen Commandant at all," he repeated, intent this time on producing the sentence without a hitch.

She caught his hand and pressed it. "How good of you to be so comforting, Citizen," she said, heaving.

Scent was about her. He said, and felt boorish, "After all, your husband is a true specimen of Soviet Man."

"No," she said quickly. "No. For that, he is too cultured." She still held his hand. "For that, he has lived too long at my side. He could be a Vladivostochnik, if it comes to culture, or a Parisian." She still held his hand, and squeezed it.

Scent was about her, a woman's presence that was unmistakably Russian, and very large. There they could see, Mr. Asa P. Watkins thought hazily; they with their Western lies about—yes, about Soviet womanhood. Whatever might be the misunderstanding that seemed to have crept into their conversation, owing to his linguistic shortcomings. "However——" he started a sentence, and noticed that he had lost his voice.

She still squeezed his hand, her bosom heaving, and whispered: "Will you swear to be his friend and see to it that nothing happens to him, and work for his promotion away from here?" She could do no more. But then, she could not do less.

"Yes," he said. Why away from here? he thought hazily. There was again that linguistic misunderstanding, owing to the pirate's negative attitude to the evening course. "Yes," he repeated hoarsely.

"I thank you," she breathed. "No one understands him. He is very lonely." There was a final squeeze.

For a fraction of a second, bewildered, he felt her large, soft lips on his cheek. His hand hurt. He was alone.

CHAPTER XII

"Who's that?" said Toboggen, starting. He was sitting in a small closet or empty store-room they had shown him into, at the back of the hotel, with a rug over his knees against the chill. A pile of newspapers lay in front of him on a coarse table, which they must have used for cutting meat on, not so long ago. The smell was still there, and the stains. A candle lit up the scene. "Who's that?" he said, and started as if a pistol had been fired close to his ear. He went on, quieter, "Ah, that's you, Ursula. You have been a long time." His voice had changed, it was more even and more unquiet, both at the same time.

She said, "I have been over—where they put you first. You were gone."

"Yes," he said, looking down at the papers in front of him.

She said, "Do you know your case is still over there? They must have brought it along from—wherever you lived—when they fetched you. It's still there."

"Oh yes." He tried to concentrate; his mind was on something else.

She said, "I mentioned it because you didn't seem to have touched it. Didn't you want to unpack? And when I went there you were gone."

He said, "I came straight over. They keep the newspapers here. I have been sitting in this room ever since and——" He fell silent, then he went on, with a strange hoarseness in his voice, "After ten years without a paper. I have been alone with this pile of newspapers here in this room." Some new flicker was in his deep-set eyes. Yes, there could be no doubt that he was changed. It almost looked as if he were a little disturbed by his daughter's presence at the moment. Restlessness was in him. Did he want to go on thinking? Was there so much to think? He said, "You had that long journey. Won't you try to get some sleep?"

She said, "Oh, that's all right. The hotel organizer gave me a room next to the American. But I don't like a room so close to him."

"What's wrong with that?"

Offers," she said.

He said, "What you hinted at when Bebitz was here? Mr. Walter Watkins is making you offers?" Oh yes, you could tell that he was roused now. His glance was steadier.

"Oh," she said lightly. "Just matrimony, I think. Would it be matrimony, if a citizen tells you that for you he'd do anything, anywhere, and so on? A citizen nearly three times your age. Two and a half times. Saying he can't sleep and can't work and can't do anything, and that he is going demented just because you point out to him that you do not think him eligible, biologically. What has that got to do with his declining into lunacy or otherwise? I think it is exaggerated. It is of course decent of him to warn me of his unsettled mental state. But that is not an argument in favour of matrimony, is it? Of matrimony or whatever else he has in mind. I don't like a citizen to tremble with his voice."

"He trembles with his voice?"

"Absolutely. Whenever he touches my hand. Whenever I touch him, unwittingly. I don't like a citizen to go demented when he is being touched. A citizen of his age and of his background. I'd rather marry a spider."

"Marry a spider?"

"Marry, or whatever such a Monopolo-Capitalist has in mind. But I think this Monopolo-Capitalist would mean marry, if I mean marry. If our Authorities would ever consent. They wouldn't, would they? Nor would I. Not to marry a spider."

"A spider?"

"A spider, or General Franco, or General MacArthur, or—well, you know what I mean," she said. "What astenishes me is that he has the nerve, just because Bebitz is dead set to make such a big success of this visit. To have the nerve, under Bebitz's eyes!"

"Oh yes, Bebitz," Toboggen said, absentminded again, and fell silent.

She sat down. She stifled a yawn. She was very tired now. After a pause, in a light voice, she said, "As a little girl once—remember? You tried to teach me geography. I said: but, father, why is the Soviet Union up there—up here where we are now, out North-East—why is the Soviet Union so white, up there on the map, I asked you. White like death, I said. You grew quite angry. It will

live! you cried. It will live!—You won't remember." She sat there, thinking. "It's all coming back to me," she said lightly, "Childhood. Funny."

He stood there in silence.

She said, "I looked in, over there, and you were gone. I looked into your case. You don't mind, do you? You've got lots of pictures of mine. I didn't know——" She stopped.

He asked quietly, "What is it you didn't know?"

She said, "That they—leave you your pictures and all that, when they——"

"When they deport you?"

She nodded.

"You see, it was part of a bargain," he said quietly.

She nodded. And said, "They never held it against me that you are my father."

He asked, "Did you ever hold it against me?"

She nodded. "Of course. When I was still immature. Now of course I know that by—unmasking those others—and confessing your mistakes—and recanting everything—you have paid, and are all right again."

He stood there, silent.

She went on, "Those pictures in your case—I didn't know most of them. Of course they are very old." She paused. "It's nice of you to have all those pictures of me," she said lightly.

He said nothing.

She said, "I used to have a snapshot of you too, somewhere. I lost it. I don't know where. With the partisans? Probably in Mongolia. They wanted to burn us in Mongolia, the Chinese Fascists wanted to, in a hut. That's where it got lost, maybe." She paused. She said, "I had kept it secretly. I wasn't supposed to, was I? It was a nice snapshot."

He said, "Never mind, I'll give you another, Ursula."

She said, "Do you mind my having looked into your case? I oughtn't to have done. Are you angry about it? But it's such a long time since I had a father. It's such a funny feeling. Bebitz would say it's petty bourgeois romanticism. It is, of course." She paused. "It's fun," she said lightly, "having petty bourgeois romanticism."

"Yes," he said. Impatient suddenly, raucous, he went on, "Now, then. Come clean. About you and Bebitz. Out with it. You really going to marry him?"

She said, "He didn't authorize me to tell. That's why he wanted me to stay behind in the truck. Because he knows that I tell the truth. What do we have Socialism for if I can't speak up and tell the truth? Except to Fascists and all that, of course." She sat there, thinking hard. "He can't bear things to be simple."

"Then why do you marry him?"

"Oh, that's all right," she said. "It's all right with him. It's the right thing for us to do. We analysed the dialectics of our personal situation."

"You did, did you?" said Toboggen.

She nodded.

He asked, "And the—analysis—is all favourable?"

"Oh no," she said. "There are pro's and con's. He doesn't really notice when other citizens make offers to me, for instance. But the figure at the bottom, if you know what I mean—the square sum—is in favour of marriage."

"How is that?"

"Look here," she said. "First of all, as a senior Specialist of the Foreign Trade Secretariat, and with me specially posted there as an interpreter, he is of course the one I have to take orders from. He is my superior and has my respect."

"Respect?"

"Absolutely. That is point one. And he works late hours, and so do I. One can go home together and sleep together." She paused. "You'll think it a minor detail probably, but it is an advantage. Or take rationing. He's got a much higher priority than myself, but I share in his if we are married. In the interests of working expediency. I don't care personally. Well, no, I do."

"You do?"

"I do. Absolutely. Or take this trip. I shouldn't have got this special assignment but for his intervention, should I? It is true that this American took an interest in me and specially asked for me. But they would never have let me if Bebitz hadn't arranged it first."

Toboggen stood there in silence. "Yes," he said at last.

The girl said, "So you can see what a great thing it is for me—the connection, and being on this trip and all. It isn't corruption either, it is correct, absolutely, because it was meant to economize our working time, his and mine, at least originally, because originally—you have a right to a week's holiday if you get married. So he told the Committee, if they post me for this trip, there won't be any extra claim for an extra holiday. How do they call it in the bourgeois countries? Honey something."

He said, "But you aren't married."

"No," she said. "It didn't come off. At the last moment. We discussed it. We'll have to wait. We agreed that the situation is immature."

"Immature?"

"But even so, as you see," she said, "it was enough for me to get posted on this trip. Just to show you the advantages. That is point one. Or was it point two?"

Toboggen said, "So that's the dialectics of your romance?"

"Absolutely. Pardon? Oh no. That was just the first point. Another point in favour is that after the general slaughter of the war and all—it is correct to have children. That has been agreed on all levels. There is absolutely no doubt about that. And it is good for you."

"Good for you?"

"It is. Physiologically. I know it as a youth organizing expert. It has been scientifically proved. And as for selection, Bebitz is a first-rate worker in his field, and respected in the Party. Very. And as for myself, he is satisfied that I am eligible."

"He is?"

"He is. He even gave it to me in writing. I've got it somewhere. No, I have it in my suitcase. He gave it to me in verse."

"In verse?"

"In verse. Absolutely."

Toboggen stood there, staring in front of him. He had been dead. He had been sucked up by a whirlwind, out of the void, not many hours ago. There were too many things at the same time bearing in on him. He stood there, groggy. He could not cope with it all. Not yet. Give me time. A year. A month. Could they not see that he was not ready yet? In this situation, for instance—how would

he have reacted, say, twenty or fifteen years ago? How was he expected to react? Laugh? He did not laugh. Cry, then? He would have felt like crying, but this resurrection of his was still devoid of reality to him. "Why," he said at last quietly, "why does he bring you here? It is so easy for him—with you—alone."

She looked at him, startled. "You don't expect him to marry me, do you, with a family background which isn't quite, quite all right? It was never held against me that you— But that applies to myself, in my modest position. With him, it is different. It would spoil his career. Absolutely. So—and you are still alive, aren't you? So he had to come and—"

"Career?" said Toboggen.

"I know," said the girl. "It's a petty bourgeois way of expressing it. But there is nothing wrong in his joining in Free Socialist Competition for advancement at his place of work and in the Party, surely? And he so much deserves it. He is brilliant. And his record and all. Do you know they tortured him, the Nazis did, back in Esthonia, for seven weeks, every day and night? And his wife and all—the accident with his wife. Owing to lack of education. He never flinched. And he comes from a first-rate family. Back in Esthonia in Tallinn, his father was a riveter."

Toboggen nodded. "So he is making his father-in-law an honest man. It is rather a private motive, don't you think?"

"But no," said the girl. "It just happens to coincide. Didn't he tell you how important it will be for something or other that the Monopolo-Capitalists can see that you haven't been bumped off—or am I putting it the wrong way? No, he requested permission first, full blanket powers, to take you or leave you. There is no risk attached to it for him privately, you needn't worry about that in the least, though of course even with full blanket powers it is a terrible responsibility, but at the same time—" She looked at him uncertainly and said in an altered voice, "Maybe I oughtn't to have told you. Was it a political indiscretion? Bebitz says I ought never— Inner Mongolia, give me Inner Mongolia. That's a country—straight, everything. Or give me the Partisans. Ludmilla Pavlichenko. She shot eighty-three Fascists. I've got—here. No. In my suitcase. I've got her autograph. Eighty-three. I shot six."

There was silence. Toboggen said—no, he said nothing.

She went on, with a little sigh, "I do so much like talking to you, father."

He had been staring in front of him. He started. "What——?"

She said, "I so much like talking to you. We must meet again."

"How do you mean?"

"We must meet again some time soon, father. Not again after years and years."

Toboggen stared at her. "I don't understand," he said quietly.

She said, "But don't you know? We'll go back again, Bebitz and I, of course, if this thing is a success. To Moscow first, and I scarcely know Moscow; all I really know is Esthonia, or Outer Mongolia. And Bebitz will get a promotion! We'll have to stay over West. While you——" She stopped.

"While I——?" As there was no answer, he repeated, "While I——?" He groped for words. "I was going to—to see a lot of you—that's how Bebitz put it."

She shook her head. "A lot, while there are these negotiations and your presence is—wanted. Then—but don't you know? Bebitz's full powers—he has no full powers to—take you away from—from your surroundings, for more than a day or so."

His face had grown very white. He asked, scarcely audible, "I am—to go back?"

She said in a light voice, quickly, "Anyway, we're bound to come to this part of the world again, some time."

Only then she looked at him more closely and asked, "You—what's the matter with you, father? Aren't you feeling well?"

CHAPTER XIII

THE message she found in her room, when she went there an hour later, was short and made her laugh a little, and made her a little angry, "—brought a few little presents along from the United States of America, and I'm afraid this is all that's left!"

Yes, she was a little angry. It was a hat. She looked at it and, contemptuously, threw it on to the clothes hooks behind the door. To be returned tomorrow. She had to think. She paced the small room, manful like a good partisan. She stopped in front of the hooks again, and took down that hat, looked at it, and gave a short laugh of contempt, and put it back on the hook to take up her stride, manfully. She whistled as she strode. It was a foreign and martial tune. She stopped again by the hooks. A mirror was nearby. She seized the hat, brutally and contemptuously, and put it on. She did not really put it on, she just dumped it on her head and looked into the mirror, and gave a short laugh of disdain. She was still whistling her martial air. Still whistling, she put the hat right, jerkily. It would not do; her sober, good, brave hair-style would not support the frivolity.

She took off the hat, and put it down on the ledge next to the mirror with careful fingers, and loosened her hair and started combing it with her little comb. She was still whistling the tune, but in a different key, long-drawn-out as a servant girl would whistle and hum on a red sunset evening in her lonely attic. Then it was no longer that tune at all, but a private little melody. She hummed it, standing there combing and combing her hair with forgetful fingers; yes, she must have quite forgotten how it all came about. Even the hat lay there on its ledge, deserted.

She started. There were steps outside in the corridor. She put away the comb. She seized the hat from the ledge, and put it back on the hook, with a jerk. She stood there listening. The steps had come to a stop outside. She hesitated. Then she opened the door, jerkily.

The youth stood outside; the one who had said he was "just a Jew": Silber was his name. "Sorry," he said. "It's so dark out here

in this corridor. I went up some stairs, and then I couldn't find them again. Lost my bearings."

She said, "I have got a torch animated with electricity. There is still a little electricity in it. I will show you the stairs."

He did not move. He looked at her fully. He said, "It was a lie, as a matter of fact. The truth is, I had hired this room, but they kicked me out the moment your party was announced. I must have left a list here, somewhere. My inventory."

She said, "Come in. Have a look."

He stepped inside and closed the door, and looked about without ambition.

"Inventory," she said, and asked airily, "What exactly is an inventory, Citizen?"

He looked at her. He said, "You wouldn't understand probably. It's a matter of individual private capitalism." He bent down a little, unambitiously, to look under the bed.

She said, "Was it a lie again?"

He said, "Partly. I have the inventory here in my pocket. Look. But it was really my room."

"It was?"

"It was. Never mind. I'll force the hotel organizer to pay me back. I don't mind really. It is true it was my room, but I am using that as an excuse to get a chance to talk to you."

She said, "Any citizen can talk to me. Are you a Party member, Citizen?"

"No," he said.

She said, "All the same, any citizen can talk to me."

He said, "That's what *you* think. It is very dangerous."

"It isn't."

"It is. Once a lady is booked, a female citizen, I meant to say—once she is booked, it is dangerous. I tried to talk to some of the seven female citizens who were released from Camp this morning. Dangerous."

"Why?"

"Because they were already booked. The moment they step outside, there are always twenty male citizens waiting to take them up. One, with a horse and sleigh, brings along a meat tin and socks. One, a real Apparatchik with all the connections, can threaten

a store manager until he gives you extra bread. One with a log cabin only forty miles from a village, and so old he probably dies inside three months and leaves it all to her. How can I compete with a man who'd die inside three months? Not a chance. I've been three years in camp without dying. I'm a bad dier; so what can I offer to a female citizen to look forward to? I wanted to go to Palestine when I was young, but now they don't let my National Group go to Palestine any longer. So what can I do? Settle. Take a bride. But they are booked."

"Booked, booked," she said airily. "I don't want to hold it against you that you were in camp for whatever you were in camp, Citizen, but it corrupted your education. In Soviet society, female citizens are not 'booked'. I am for Liberty, absolutely. A certain citizen with whom I came here, and with whom I share my place of employment, Citizen Senior Specialist Bebitz—absolutely for Liberty. My father, too. I happen to have a father at present. Absolutely for Liberty. In the October Revolution, he was in charge of the liberation of the Kronstadt fleet, in 1917."

He said, "Kronstadt fleet, Kronstadt fleet. Any Jews been there?"

"I don't know," she said. "But if there were some they must have been all right. Nobody ever heard anything to the contrary."

"They haven't got a fleet really, the Jews haven't," he said. "Just making a start, that's all."

She said, "The Soviet Navy is the most powerful in the world."

"Is it?" he said, without interest.

She said, "Why were you in camp? Are you a criminal element?"

He said, "Because I ran away from the Nazis. Over the frontier, you know. I ran so much I got right into the Soviet Union. So they arrested me, because I was over twelve. Just over. 'Have you got a valid Soviet visa'—that sort of thing. Three years' hard labour in the Kolyma mines. Would that be Criminal Element, or Counter-Revolution?"

She said, "Criminal."

"All right, criminal," he said lightly. "But I couldn't do gold-mining, not when I was twelve. I should be a better dier if I was in gold-mining."

"A better dier?"

'Yes, of course. You die in gold-mining inside two years, except the ones who die in one, and in tree-felling you die in three years, unless you die earlier.' Lightly, he asked, "Ever felled a tree?"

"No," she said.

"You would have to," he said. "They never put women into gold. Doesn't work. They wouldn't make two years in gold, they would make two months. Doesn't pay. Tree-felling, yes. But not gold. For trees, they put them in couples to fell a tree. Because when it knocks out one, the other can go home and tell. With trees, it is economical. You would be half-a-couple of tree fellers."

"Would I?"

"Yes. Except if you are a Kontrik. If you are a Kontik, it is funny. They die anyway. Give me a Criminal Anti-Social Element. But Kontriks die. Fell a tree—no, they die Uneconomical. See? So my philosophy is: there is no business in counter-revolution. You will probably not understand, Citizen."

She said, "I understand, absolutely. It is dialectics."

"Dialectics," he said. "I know dialectics. In Palestine they have the biggest Communists. Bigger than any Communist in the Soviet Union. Ever heard of Shloyme Shnatter? The greatest Communist. Or Menuhem Plotz."

"In the Soviet Union," she said, "in the Soviet Union, anti-semitism is a crime, Citizen. You go to prison for anti-semitism."

"Or Mojshe Rosenwasser," he said. "Biggest Communist. Dialectics—you ought to, see our dialectics. Or Talmud. Much older. Probably a thousand years older, Citizen. And better too."

"A thousand years, a thousand years," she said with a slight gesture of controlled disdain. "Things aren't better because they are older, that is established, absolutely. Think of Evolution, Citizen. For dialectics you ought to hear Bebitz, the comrade who is my superior at my place of work, the one with the black moustache. Brilliant."

He asked, "Is he your man?"

There was silence. With a slight, elegantly evasive gesture she said, "'Your.' In the Soviet Union we don't use any pronouns of possession." She paused, and added lightly, "We are in an engaged state." She paused, and asked, "Are you in an engaged state, Citizen?"

"Engaged," he said. "Twice. No, wait, four times. Two were gassed. By the Nazis, you know. Oswiecim."

"Why?"

"That's the word, why? If you can make them fell trees and all. Uneconomical. That was two. I was very young then. But when you're waiting to get gassed, you see—you've got to be quick. That was two of them."

"And the others?"

"Typhoid," he said. "One died of typhoid here in camp, Citizen. Hunger typhus. Because she couldn't fell a tree, that's how small she was, just couldn't fell a tree in winter, with the snow up to her waist. So she was punished, of course. Isolator Cell. She didn't freeze up, though. Just stubborn. Must die of hunger typhus. She was called—ah, well. A French name; you wouldn't know it. Funny."

"And the fourth?"

There he stood, thinking. "Don't know, really," he said lightly. "Moved, probably. No, I know now. I lost the job, in that camp."

"A job in a camp for female citizens?"

"Female citizens, other citizens, every citizen. Didn't I say? I am the shaver, see? Shaving, delousing, everything. In that women's camp I worked as a shaver. When they arrive, you know—must be shaved all over, because of lice. That's me. She came back for delousing every single month. That was our romance."

"Always with new lice?" She laughed a little. They were still standing there, two very young citizens, facing each other in the narrow room.

"Not with new lice," he said, looking at her in great seriousness.

"Why should she bother about new lice? With her old lice. Because the citizen who did the delousing was a Stakhanovite."

"How is that?" She laughed. Her voice was like a bell.

"His delousing norm," he said evenly, looking at her laughter, "his norm was: delouse two hundredweight of clothing at a time, at a hundred centigrade. So he found out, if he warmed it up only to fifty centigrade, he could put in not two hundredweight at a time, and not four hundredweight, but eight. See? Double the norm, if you get me. A delousing Stakhanovite. That's why, she

could always come back with her old lice. That was the third. Or the fourth? Yes, the fourth."

She said, "I was in an engaged state only once before. With a Mongol Partisan. He was a Hero of the Outer Mongol Republic."

"And?" he said.

She said, "He was promoted to be a propagandist all the way down in Tibet. It's a very great honour."

"And?" he said, leaning against the wall. They were still standing there in the narrow room.

She made a slight gesture, evasive and elegant. "He didn't write," she said lightly. "Only one postcard. I've got it—no, I haven't, it's in my suitcase. 'Down with the Fascist Invader, Hail Comrade Stalin', and his signature. It was the only postcard he wrote from Tibet." Lightly, she asked, "Do they admit women who aren't Jewesses?"

"Where?"

She looked at him, faintly contemptuous. "Why, in that Palestine of yours."

"Don't know," he said, blushing. "Never occurred to any, probably."

"Oh," she said coolly.

Awkward, he said, "Maybe they admit them on a honorary basis."

She said, "In the Soviet Union, there is no discrimination against a female citizen just because she doesn't happen to be a Jew."

There was silence. Then he said, "You lied, didn't you? It was you who lied this time."

"I never lie. Soviet man —"

"I know, don't tell me," he said evenly. "But you lied about being engaged to the black moustache. Everybody knows——"

"What?"

"The American. Why do you ask? Is America really going to take over here? You wouldn't tell me, probably. Now look. I told you why I came, first. Then I told you why I really came. I am going to tell you why I came really, really."

"So you lied twice," she said, disapproving.

"Three times. Was it twice? Look. I want you to introduce me to the American. Shaving, all right, shaving. But what I really want

him for is—you see, as they don't let my National Group go to Palestine, maybe I can be occupied by America? I want to have his advice. On delousing and all. How do they delouse in the United States? And in case I go in for—I have so much ambition, you see. I have so much ambition! Slowly-slowly I'm getting old, and—all right, I have a little position of respect here, but it isn't enough. If I go in for Stakhanovism in the United States, how much does one make as a Stakhanovite? What's the extra ration? Because, you see, I am not used to eating very much, so maybe if I can sell my extra Stakhanovite ration in the free market? And I have my inventory here. I know it's Monopolo-Capitalism, I just can't help it. It is owing to my family background, my father, you see, back in Poland before they gassed him, he was a Monopolo-Capitalist, a tailor in a village. Now, can the American have a look at the inventory of my Monopolo-Capitalism and tell me what everything is worth in America?" He took out his paper, and started reading from it, "One Razor—Seven secondhand razor blades, without rust on them, not a spot. Ditto, nine with a little rust—Four flourbags, American Lead-I case, clean. It's a fortune! Three tins, Mustard Gas First Aid Ointment, for lice. One small bottle with—I don't know what it is, really. Do you? 'Vanilla Flavour'. Maybe the American knows? I battered it, as a speculation. Fourteen——"

He stopped. They started. The door was thrust open. It was Toboggen. He came in stumbling. He was changed. He must have come by some drink since his daughter left him. Though it made him not drunk but sober, a drunkard's soberness. Yes, he was changed, there he stood like a rugged king. Maybe he was swaying a little, but he propped himself up against the wall and leant there, gigantic.

"Ursula," he said, with a heavy tongue.

"Oh," she said quietly. She looked at the young Jew.

Toboggen stared at him. Then he said in an undertone, "Get out."

A second later the boy had gone; not opening his mouth; after one black glance; smooth as a lizard.

Toboggen held a newspaper out to his daughter in a swaying hand. "Ursula," he said in a whisper. "Come nearer. Ursula." He

hit the paper with the back of his free hand, and whispered, "They can't do that. Do you hear? They're doing it all wrong. Every move a wrong move. The fellow on top is mad. Do you hear? Everything a shambles." He stared at her, hitting the paper with his fingers, and said, loud and clear, "He is a madman." Blood shot into his hollowed face, suddenly. His eyes were flaring. He roared, "What is he making of our Revolution?"

He checked himself a moment later, and started trembling, and cast a frightened glance at the door. Still holding out the newspaper in his trembling hand, he whispered, "And these—these whippersnappers—these nit-wits—these nincompoops—think they can call—Toboggen—Toboggen!—from the forest, and after a day or two—send him back? Out of sight? Dead?" His face had grown very white again. He said, "If they'd put their ears to the frozen ground up here, they could hear it. The signals. From camp to camp. From camp to camp. All the time. Day and night. Millions. Waiting. Millions. Waiting." With his knuckle, he knocked a signal out on the bedpost. "Like this. Can you hear?" He knocked. Morse. "Can you hear? Millions! Waiting!" Ah, he was drunk. Whispering, all but inaudible, trembling heavily, he said, "I am alive. Ursula, I am alive!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE Cultural Activity had at last got under way. The hurried and exacting conference the Commandant's wife had had with Cultural Propagator Leibovich showed results. The Cultinst, or Cultural Institute, communicating with the rear wing of the hotel, was crowded. Minor local officials had flocked in with their families, and Former Anti-Social Elements released from camp and forcibly settled in the district. Contacts between the two groups were cautious but not discouraged. The new camp guard with the great cultural talent—he had done his humorous and optimism-reinforcing amateur ventriloquist's turn four times so far—had been summoned from his bed and had offered his contribution number five. A highly patriotic ballad by the recent winner of the Stalin Prize, Honoured Culturist Fadeyev, was just being recited by Citizeness Assistant Teacher Varbarova—the eleventh stanza so far, dealing with the exploits of one Sub-Lieutenant Karachierashvili, standard-bearer in a simple line regiment, who, surrounded by the Fascist invader, with no chance of escape, rather than let the flag fall into their hands—

“Already he detaches the old silk, and puts it in his mouth,”

Citizeness Varbarova, sad-voiced but keen on poetry, is just reciting,

“The Fascist invaders creep nearer, uncultured and uncouth.
Already he swallows the ribbons, the lay one is just sticking
out,
His breaking ear still gathers their furious, venomous shout.
Now the flagpole! he says and starts gnawing, swallows half
of the pole with zest—
Ten thousand Fascist invaders plunge their daggers into his
breast.”

A ballad, in short, by Stalin Prize Holder, Honoured Culturist Fadeyev. After a few further stanzas they will all clap, the duet will

come next, then the brass band, playing Honoured Culturist Shostakovich's "Retraction of a Petty Bourgeois Symphony in E flat". Comrade Gorbakov, Cell Secretary and Manager of Staprodisc, has sent the instruments after all; he is down with diarrhoea, owing to fish.

At that minute, outside in the street, the high functionary Tretjak was walking alone up and down the pavement. Wrapped in thought, and lazy of digestion, he was bent on taking his constitutional. Two men approached him, twin-brotherly, and while one of them held back, the other—a citizen by the name of Schwankov, the articulate half of the said pair of twins—addressed the Specialist. "Ah," he said, breezy yet respectful, "ah, the comrade too is longing for a bit of fresh air."

The functionary grunted something unintelligible, and walked on. He would not be deflected from his path. At the same time, this former German war prisoner was of the desirable and straightforward type, he had made an excellent impression when questioned amongst others an hour or two ago. The type was to be encouraged. Tretjak lifted the edges of his mouth into a little smile; it lasted for exactly two seconds, then it dropped out of his face again like a stone. He walked on.

The German, falling in by his side, keeping in step like a soldier, said, "The soldier's fate. Having to live up here. Though conditions of course are excellent. Still, I lost my heart in White Russia."

"Did you?" The smile, three seconds. The important official himself hailed from White Russia. Unofficial contacts with the force-settled population up here were to be treated with circumspection. With the exception, of course, of evidently desirable individuals, when they might be used for feeling the pulse; cross-checking; as an opportunity to impart political enlightenment; and as a basis for reports. The smile, three seconds; then Tretjak said, "You like White Russia?"

Schwankov exclaimed, "I have a White Russian fiancée!"

It was the point for the Specialist to step back into the Cultinst, or else to try. He turned. So did Schwankov, keeping in step militantly.

Tretjak said, "Ah ha." Affianced to a White Russian comrade.

There *were* desirable ones among the force-settled population, however few and far between. He said, "Ah ha. A White Russian. Was she in the Partisans?"

Schwankov, keeping in step militarily, exclaimed, "You ought to have seen her breasts. *This* size. A soldier's word of honour."

Only their backs were visible as they walked away. Tretjak said, "Soviet women *are* the most beautiful."

Fifty yards down, the citizens turned and walked up again, militarily.

The deaf-mute was standing at the corner.

At the same minute, inside the building, Mr. Asa P. Watkins was in a state of slight irritation. His efforts at fraternization, successful though they had been with Tretjak, seemed to prove unavailing with minor citizens. For reasons that he could not understand, they shunned contact with him. Or was it that they shunned contact with foreigners generally? After two words, the moment they discovered his identity, or his foreignness, they looked about frightened, and evaporated.

Puzzled but undismayed, he queued with them all for something to drink. He did not choose to a buy the other thing, in bottles, and carried his to a small back room, where he found himself all but alone and unobserved. There he sat with the glass in which he had poured from the bottle in front of him, and it was still untouched. It was a white substance, made of U.S.A. Lend-Lease milk powder that had gone moist and started fermenting; on the label (decipherable to a linguist like Asa P.) it said, simply and beautifully, "Comrade Stalin"; it tasted like poison, it stank in your nostrils like diluted hell, our comrades scientists were said to have attested that it contained vitamins.

Mr. Asa P. Watkins did not mind that. What he could not help minding a little was the citizeness who in the end had attached herself to him and did not seem to be frightened off by his foreignness. She seemed to have given him to understand that there was a young one too, just having a conference with a citizen on something or other, somewhere up in the hotel. (Or ~~did~~ his linguist's proficiency let him down, after all?) This one was the young one's mother— if she was her mother. She talked incessantly. Had he got

made up his mind to fraternize with the Masses, he would have withdrawn.

She was a woman certainly not under fifty-five. She must have had a tough time lately. She bent close to him, pushing him with her *décolleté*, her skin fresh as stale fish and shapely as half-run-out sandbags in a deserted air-raid protection trench. Yes, she must have had a tough time indeed until yesterday, and must have got back her old things on release from camp; believe it or not, they hadn't pinched them, must have been a mistake. She bent close to him, with a stinkingly powdered old whore's face, smiling with gold teeth—for that's what she had, no Soviet steel—and watching him with eyes cold as a pawnbroker's or an old hen's.

"Now, what about it, Citizen?" she said hoarsely, coquettish as a corpse. "You recall, from America, or is it boloney? Or you a Party sleuth, or a Ministry sleuth—that your case? No? *Agentski provokatski*? Because with us, you needn't try it on with us, we're foreigners, they only picked us up by a complete misunderstanding, down at Galatz, Rumania, that's why they let us out again. You a sleuth? I guessed it, didn't I? No? Because in that case I could give you the low-down on the low-down crowd you find in this country in such a ladies' camp. They aren't patriotic at all. Political elements, if you know what I mean. Giving themselves an air. If you are a sleuth, is it true they want to hand over the camps to America? I thought not. There is a rumour a commission has arrived to hand over the camps. It'll be a riot. That's how patriotic those women are. Or in case you aren't a sleuth, are you of the marrying type? Because in that case you're late. Of the seven ladies released this morning, five have married and are gone. The sixth is me. The seventh—well, can't you speak up? You don't really understand Russian, do you? Nix Deutsch neither? *Parlez-vous français?*"

She pushed him with her elbow, they were alone in the room; she laughed; it sounded like a cracked nightpot smashed to smithereens on a brick floor. Next door in the assembly hall, the work by Honoured Culturist Fadeyev had come to a close, and there was much clapping.

The woman said, "Now listen, you a Pole really, what? Are you a marrying man? Got a job up here, or have they scolded you

out of a camp? If you are a marrying man with something to offer—let's see your pocketbook with your documentation—ai, just a joke, I thought you wanted to slap my hand. If you've something to offer—there is my friend, sec? Not a Kontrik. She is having a conference with a citizen at the moment; he says he is something in the Party, but——”

She turned to another woman who was just coming in, and said with her nightpot laughter, “There, Wanda. May I introduce? The citizen is a Pole.” Next door, the duet had started. The soprano of our soprano, Citizeness Holobenka the photographer, was climbing bravely.

The woman addressed as Wanda was very young, probably twenty-three, certainly not older than twenty-six. She had weathered the discomforts of the police raid bravely; waiting in the street wrapped in a soldier's greatcoat had done her no harm; nor indeed had her life in camp—judging from her skin which was fresh and as pink-and-white as you would expect in a piece like her, of the piglet type. She was well-found, with high, plump breasts, with a behind like a country wench, and thighs that showed to fine advantage under her flimsy frock. She had found time to attend to her blackened lashes, adorning eyes that were a bit too bulging but had a slight squint which, as with most of her sex, was apt to be mistaken for a promise of elusive sophistication and secretive sensuality. Though there was nothing secret about her short nose, a piglet's, and a full-lipped but too small mouth, embellished and enlarged with a sound layer of wartime lipstick that didn't stick to its place; in the course of her conference with a Party personage upstairs, or while taking a sip of something, the young lady had smeared it to the right and had not found a minute yet to repair the damage. Her hair, peroxide-coloured once again—she'd got back her things!—was drawn tightly off a clear-skinned if narrow brow, steep up, once again, into what she fondly hoped was a modish hair-do that would make her look taller than she was. All in all, if you looked at her from the front or if you looked at her from behind, she was, in spite of two years in camp, ever since they snatched her from her Rumanian motherland, quite a roundworth specimen.

“A Pole?” she said with a Marlene Dietrich voice, approaching

the citizen with a Marlene Dietrich swing of her pleasing hips. She looked at him closely, and said alluringly, "The gentleman is a Jew."

The old one laughed shrilly and said, "We'll find out. Let's have a look, ducky." She slapped her thigh. Ah, what a joke it was. The duet was over, next door.

The young one, standing by Asa P. Watkins's chair, waved at him the black, stiff fence that was her lashes, and said huskily, "Don't listen to her. She speaks like a procuress. She wants me to sleep with everyone. But I am an artist. Wanda Miranda, that's me. You have probably heard my name. I like Jews, anyway. One of my best friends. The nicest man. He had my talent trained for the stage."

The old one slapped her thigh, laughing.

The young one, turning to her companion, said haughtily, "Why do you laugh, dear?" And to Asa P., "She just used to be my dresser, back in Galatz, Rummin. Gudelobitch. I took her along out of pity."

"Out of pity, eh?" the old one said unguily. She had stopped laughing.

The artiste said, huskily and indolently, "She was so frightened of the Russians she'd wet her panties."

"Me?" said the old one. And to Mr. Asa P. Watkins, in a rush, "You can ask the whole Municipal Theatre of Galatz, who was frightened. On her knees she begged of me, 'Elsie, the Russians are coming, Elsie, take me home, you have the little cottage your uncle left you out by the sea, Elsie, so you take me along, we'll make a little something of it: a pension, a restaurant, I'll scrub the floors for you, anything, Elsie, only take me along.' The only floor she ever scrubbed was that day she begged of me—she scrubbed it with her knees."

"A lie," the young one, forgetting to be Marlene Dietrich, said torrentially to the gentleman. "A lie, you go ask not just the theatre—the whole of Giltz will tell you I could have stayed easily; the Popovici stayed, the Holoschowitz stayed, the Russians wouldn't have done a thing to me. I knew a gentleman, he was the greatest Communist. The Wiesentopf stayed, the soprano, in spite of her husband being in the German Extermination Service. So there, and what did they do to her? She wasn't raped once." She waved with the fence. "What did me in was my romantic heart, for a Soviet

lieutenant, all the way up to Kiev, but there the war was finished—and he was demobbed. That is what did me in.”

From next door the solemn bars of Honoured Culturist Shostakovich's 'Recantata', E flat, were floating over. They were all listening.

The citizeness continued, “As I was saying, I could have stayed at Galatz in ‘Gipsy Baron’. Everybody knows the Russians are so artistic. I could have stayed in ‘Merry Widow’, I could have stayed in——”

“The Wiesentopf,” the old one interrupted her, “they didn’t rape the Wiesentopf because she was in her eighth month. They raped the Holeschowitz sixty-seven times. They raped the Popovici, they raped the Zeck, they raped the old fat one, what’s her name, you know who I mean, the one with the diabetes; she is seventy-two, and they raped——”

Mr. Asa P. Watkins absented himself at that moment, with a muttered word of apology.

“The Holeschowitz,” the actress Wanda Miranda said behind him torrentially while he walked away, “the Holeschowitz would boast they raped her sixty-seven times, while in fact, at most, at the very, very most, they raped her only——”

He had left by then. He had fled. He was greatly disturbed. Was it the language? He did not understand! He did understand, of course, that this heart-warming hul-and-heartiness, this great Freedom of Expression—it just showed you, did it not? And some people back home having the effrontery to doubt, or rather to suggest, that—— Or how was that again? At any rate, it was a revelation to see the life of the Masses, close to the soil, and yet at the same time—or was there something all the same that he had misunderstood? It was very Russian at any rate, he decided; and very vast.

Back in the small room, left to themselves, unmindful of the next door Cultural Activity, the artiste Wanda Miranda had lifted her frock. With needle and cotton in a tortuous position, she was busy sewing a lost button on her cami-knickers, at a discreet location. With a voice not husky nor torrential she said, “He says he is an Apparatchik, but what’s he got? Says he’s got connections. Has he got connections with tax-fies? Has he got connections with cats?”

No. His connection is, he goes about and checks the camp humanity. The wastage, I mean. Goes to the camps, and where he sees from the books more than a third have died in a year—that's against humanity. Output or no output. Wastage over a third—at once he makes a denunciation. A report, I mean. A humanity checker." She had finished sewing, and straightened herself and said, "If I give up Soviet citizenship, they can't force me to settle here, he says. As a Rumanian, they'd only convict me for being a Friendly Ally. Back to camp. Do I mind going back to camp?"

The old one, sniffing at Asa P. Watkins's glass, said, "He hasn't touched his Stalin." She sniffed again. "Want some?" she asked peacefully.

The young one said, "No."

Asa P. Watkins, meanwhile, had stepped outside the Cultinst again. Two men were standing at the far side of Stalin Boulevard, facing what will become the People's Terrace Gardens for Rest and Culture. Seen from behind, they looked much alike, in their squat, round solidarity.

"Pushkin," said Tretjak. "Very poetic."

Schwankov said, "Pushkin, Schiller, yes. Or Horst Wessel. You won't know the name, a first-rate poet, whatever certain people may say about him."

"Pushkin," said Tretjak. "Pushkin, Lermontov. And Stalin. The greatest poets."

They were standing there, side by side, facing the Rest and Culture. It splashed. "A delight," said Schwankov.

Asa P. Watkins fled inside.

CHAPTER XV

SEEN from where Comrade Borodin, Local Commandant, was sitting, at the back of what was called the box in the centre of the balcony of the assembly hall, it all looked a great spectacle and a great success. Though to see it really, he had to squeeze close to the side wall, or else go down on all fours, to look out at the side or underneath, whichever the case might be, of the huge portrait of Comrade Stalin that they had put there to preside over the community. (At the back of the great leader, visible to the Local Commandant, it merely said, "This Side Up".) However, Borodin was not deterred, he exposed himself to the physical exertions of looking out repeatedly, heightened as his spirits were by the discovery of fourteen bottles, fourteen, of genuine old vodka in that cupboard; a store which he had thought was dead and gone long ago, why, since the great days of Vyshnevetski, since the first expedition up to Gaudy Bight, since the year of the foundation of Posshank a few miles inland. (And to think they hauled his good chief and protector Vyshnevetski all the way to Moscow after that first mishap and sentenced him to fifteen years—for what? For nothing. For next to nothing.)

Yes, he thought, Vyshnevetski had drunk that vodka. Fate interrupted him. It was a sad thought to think. It was not given to him to witness the beautiful, beautiful spectacle out there at the far side of Comrade Stalin—the ventiloquist first, and then Honoured Culturist Fadeyev's poem, so moving, swallowing all those flags, but there you could see what Soviet man is like once he gets going, with Fascist invaders, or with vodka. You just open a cupboard and there it is. And to think that last winter some people were down to drinking the spirit from the big glass jars with hearts in, or fingers, or little citizens still so small they don't look like Soviet comrades but like fish, and Comrade Senior Nurse Probinkova later mad at everybody and saying it is all spoiled. What can spoil in a finger which is cut off anyway? Would the fish grow to be Soviet soldiers? So there

"Scenery," Borodin said aloud. He contemplated another

attempt to peep out on all fours underneath the "This Side Up", but abandoned it. "So there," he said to that excellent, excellent citizen he had had fetched out of the forest by special aeroplane on orders from up high, and he a good citizen, not averse to a glass of— "And Vishnevetski was never to drink it," he said, greatly moved, at the tragic thought. And after Culturist Fadeyev had swallowed it out there, there was the beautiful, beautiful music, only a little long, and then the Official Reception up on the platform; he really ought to be there, but, haha, just let them try and find him; they won't look for him behind the "This Side Up", not in the cupboard. I have another glass, Citizen Tobogg; I don't mind if you mind, I want to say I don't know that I mind, I don't mind anyway.

The Citizen Distinguished Guest, the American, saying something to the audience, the girl translating, and the audience saying something to—ah, and do you know who arranged it all? My wife, the Cultural Propagator Borodina, arranged it all; you must meet her tomorrow, no, better tonight; no, still better tomorrow after all; but in bed, Citizen, in bed she is no propagator, only cultural; oh yes, if it comes to being cultural she is cultural, but, Citizen, you ought to see her behind, which is the most beautiful, beautiful behind in all Poshansk. Look at the official reception on the platform; there will be dancing later; all right, I'll give you all the rest of this bottle on condition you agree with me that the behind of Citizeness Borodina is a flash in the pan, no, she doesn't propagate. Let's drink to the memory of Cominadant Vishnevetski! Citizen, do you know the history of the foundation of the—and they are mad at me, Citizen Tretjak is, because the electric cable runs through the camp. What's wrong for a cable to run where it likes? Can be cut. Who cuts? They ought to have come up six years ago—where was there a cable? They ought to, four years ago, when Com-mandant Vish—!

Ah, he must stop. Ah, it had occurred to him suddenly. Ah, he must laugh so much.

Tobogg sat there, drunk. "Yes," he said with a heavy tongue. "Vishnevetski. The Second Boss."

"The third," Borodina corrected him, laughing. "The third. Berson the Lett; the first. The one Yagoda sent out to Kolyona with

two hundred thousand. The one they later invited back to Moscow and shot with Yagoda. That's one. Can you count? One. Then Yeshoy and Vyshinski sent out Garanin. Sent him a hundred thousand Kontriks each year. Who can work a mine with Kontriks? Citizen, I tell you because I love you, it didn't work. No production. Do you know what Kontriks produce, Citizen? You know, because you are a Kontrik swine yourself, but I love you. All a Kontrik produces is human wastage. A mess. Dig him in. Do you understand what I mean? Dig him in! And only because Garanin dug in twenty-six—ah, but he shot them first, Counter-revolutionary Wreckers without production. So what do they want? Twenty-six thousand. Clear up the mess, see? But the comrades in Moscow—oh no. They'd send a man to prison only because he cleared up twenty-six. They haven't got a heart." Tears rose to his eyes, his feelings were so all-embracing, and soft as butter. "So you see now, Citizen, that Vishnevetski was the third boss, not the second boss? A noble man. Didn't shoot. What do you say? He just didn't shoot. So there. Mortality wastage never over thirty per cent a year. Correct. So there you are. And what did he fall over? He fell over a decoration. There is no justice in the world." Tears were in his eyes, ah, brother, even the behind of a certain citizeness was forgotten. There were only tears.

Toboggen stared at him, sober as a drunkard. He asked with a heavy tongue, "Fell over a decoration?"

"What is there wrong," Borodin requested to know behind the "This Side Up", "what's wrong for a citizen to want a decoration? Am I right? Ah." The vodka got the better of him, so he must laugh again. "Wants a decoration—so he rigged up the ship. The ship, the expedition, from Magadan up North to our little country here, just here where we stand; no, not just where we stand, we stand three miles inland here at Poshansk; but there was no Poshansk then, no railway, no nothing; the ship was just going three miles out there where the bare coast is; ah, the coast, Gaudy Bight, Buchta Dresva, that's where the little ship was to go, the little expedition, and I his humble adjutant, only a sub-lieutenant, not a commandant, a sub-lieutenant, that's how he rigged up the ship at Magadan. It was to start in May, the month of love-making, but not with a propagator, oh no, I could tell you confidentially,

honestly, man to man, I don't mind a man to share my manly confidence as long as he is a Marxist-Leninist—am I right? Was to start in May, but slowly, slowly we started from Magadan in August, on the fourth, an old ship but good and large. What is large? Is God large? Is Russia large? This ship was large, with two large holds—if you know what holds is—holds is where they hold the rats. One hold with little male prisoners, five thousand, that is all and everything, one hold with beautiful, beautiful—but they weren't beautiful. Six hundred, that was all. Female anti-social elements and counter-elementary wreckers, counter—what did I say? You know what I mean, you are my brother. And up on deck eight hundred Free Citizens, as we have here now, released from camps; and they must settle, so why not settle in Gaudy Bight Dresva, am I right, was he right, the giver of these excellent, excellent—? I have another glass. Because you are a brother. You are a swine, a revolutionary wrecker, but a brother all the same. We sailed on fourth August, which is a little at the beginning of winter, but little brother Vishneverki must have his decoration this year, not next year—see? Because the Russian soul tells you—who knows whether he will live next year? And after three days——!" He could not continue, he must laugh so much.

Not all that funny really, come to think of it. The s.s. *Dalstroi*, otherwise used for carrying prisoners from Vladivostok to Magadan, left Magadan, this time for the expeditionary trip up North, on August 4th, 1940. In one hold, it had 3,400 male prisoners, in the other, a number of women which cannot be ascertained; Borodin's figure of six hundred was probably too high. The dividing walls between holds were strongly reinforced, after the incident of the s.s. *Dshurma* the year before, when the men smashed the walls to get at the stores. There was panic. Then someone set fire to the ship. It reached harbour burning.

That was why the walls between holds in the *Dalstroi* had been reinforced. In fact it had not been the *Dalstroi* at all that had been scheduled for the expedition up North, but the s.s. *Indigirka*. But the *Indigirka* too was not by that time; she left Magadan on December 2nd, 1939, for Vladivostok. Most passengers were free citizens or released prisoners. Among those who were not released, there

was a German Communist, by the name of Erna D., former secretary of Ernst Thaelmann and Wilhelm Pieck. As a Counter-Revolutionary Trotskyite wrecker, she was under a fifteen years' sentence in the Kolyma camps; she was, however, on her way back West, along with many other German Communist exiles, to be handed over to the Nazis as a token of goodwill in consequence of the Stalin-Hitler Pact of August, 1939. That ship was wrecked by an iceberg. Two hundred people were saved by the Japanese and put ashore at Vladivostok. There they were questioned closely as to what lies they might have told the Japanese about the alleged existence of prison camps. Whereupon they were sent back to those camps, ex-prisoners and ex-free citizens alike.

That was why the s.s. *Indigarka* was no longer available for the expedition up North; only the s.s. *Dalstroi*. And as for the reinforcement of the walls between holds, that was of course not so much because men might break through to the stores, but because men might break through to the women—is happened in that case of the four hundred and sixty-three "Ukasuli", young women sent to concentration camp for not turning up for work in a factory, or coming more than twenty minutes late, after a warning. That time, the men broke through. Of the four hundred and sixty-three girls, four hundred and sixty-three were raped, Kontriks and Anti-Social Elements alike. A few Kontriks, husbands and fiancés and all that, tried to defend them. They were stabbed to death. Fifteen were missing when the ship reached port. There would be none of that on the s.s. *Dalstroi*, and that was why the Chief, Vishnevetski, ordered the walls to be reinforced.

Nothing happened, accordingly. Though of course none of the guard would enter any of the holds in transit in any case. Give me a watch tower, barbed wire, give me a gun to shoot over an open sight—but not a hold. Nothing happened in the first three days after the s.s. *Dalstroi* left harbour—with the exception of those eight women who fell under the tram. Men were allowed out of the hold in batches of a dozen, up to the latrine—watched over by a dozen guards, bayonet up, finger on the trigger. Though you could bribe those guards. They'd send you a citizen's round, if a citizeness wanted to step round for a cigarette. But once you could persuade them to step behind the door—well, it is called the tram,

they just fell under the tram, the guards getting their bribe in kind, as often as not, and a fifty-fifty chance of catching gonorrhoea and syphilis at one and the same time. Unless, of course, they weren't the getters, but the givers, and that again was a fifty-fifty chance; and the citizenesses had only themselves to blame, if they were so rash as to step round for a cigarette. They just fell under the tram! And that was all that happened really on board the *U.S. Dalstroj* in the first three days out of Magadan on her way up North.

"Fallen under the tram," Borodin repeated. He had grown tearful again, all of a sudden. "The Ukastiki. So many blooms of human virginity—human Socialist Marxist-Leninist virginity—am I right? Picked. The blooms, I mean. Very sad. Or the eleven hundred Young Communist heroines volunteering for Stakhanovite pioneer work in Kolyma after the war—and what sort of pioneer work were they put to? Very, very sad. Am I right? Picked. The blooms, I mean. Or take gonorrhoea. It ill combines with virginity, as the poet says." He thought deeply. "Though I knew an officer," he said, musing, "who said he could get gonorrhoea by walking without boots. A cavalry officer from Molotovgrad, a lieutenant-colonel. Just walk without boots—gonorrhoea. That's progress for you." He thought deeply. "So mankind progresses, and progresses, and progresses," he muttered. At the far side of the "This Side Up", somebody said something, and there was some clapping.

Toboggen said, through his drunkenness, "Walking without boots. When I was in the death cell that time they convicted me, with many others, with a young comrade, Lapatov, too—and I had been weak, I had denounced him as a counter-revolutionary wrecker, along with thirty-two others, denounced them all, but they had condemned me to death with the rest of them all the same—that Comrade Lapatov with me in the death cell was in a poor state. They had taken him in pyjamas; didn't let him dress for some reason or other, so he was in pyjamas. Bedroom slippers—so he was in bedroom slippers for—it took them seven months before they had us all conditioned as ordered. What wore down that man Lapatov was his slippers. Humiliation, humiliation! His nerves gone by then, of course. The subtle art of cross-examination. With me in the same cell, and I, responsible. So when they—rapped at the

iron door—and called out my name, to be ready in two minutes to be fetched—I had a pair of good, strong boots, then. ‘Comrade Lapatov, brother,’ I said—ah, with—yes, with tears—‘Comrade, they’re fetching me for a walk that will be short. You’ll walk that same way tomorrow like a man, in my boots. Let me have your slippers!’ He stopped, and stared in front of him. He muttered, “So much for walking without boots.”

“And?” said Borodin. “And, and, and?”

“What——?” Toboggen started out of his musings. “They fetched me,” he said, “not for execution but to read out to me that my reprieve had been granted. It was a deal. I did not get back to the cell. I walked in those slippers for two years. Lubjanka, Butyrka, Omsk, Vladivostok, Kolyma, the forest, the eternal wastes. Sacking wrapped around them, and two slabs of an old tyre stuck underneath. But they were still the slippers of Lapatov.” He stared in front of him and said almost inaudible, “So much for walking without boots.”

Borodin slapped his thigh, and sat there laughing. “Ha,” he said. “Ha-ha.”

Toboggen said, “I shall not go back.

“Sure,” said Borodin. He got up. He put his glass down, swaying. He kissed Toboggen on the cheek solemnly. “Hi,” he said. “Hick.”

Toboggen stared at him. He asked, “And that expedition?”

“Which?”

“Up to Gaudy Bight,” said Toboggen. “You started telling about Gaudy Bight.”

“Ah,” said Borodin, laughing. Yes, he had started telling about it, he remembered now. In the s.s. *Dalstrel*, he remembered now, but he couldn’t speak, he had to laugh so much.

Not all that funny, really. The ship sailed on August 4th. In the evening of August 7th she ran into a storm. The horses went mad first. Then the women, in their hold that was not opened. Gaudy Bight was reached in the end—a barren coastline, swamps, not yet frozen. Where there was soil, it carried a fast layer of snow; not deep yet, three feet, four feet. If you started digging, the permanent ice was hit at eight inches and a third. Winter was

closing in overnight, the ship blocked by pack ice. Far off, out of reach, there was the forest, and the hills. The prisoners started building their camp—watch towers first, then barbed wire fences. Their huts were to come last. That is the coldest country of the earth. In winter, the temperature goes down to minus seventy centigrade. The prisoners had been sent in their summer outfits: kapok quilted vests, thin denim trousers or denim frocks, thin boots, no gloves. During the journey, to reach the store and the winter outfits you would have had to pass through the men's cage and open the reinforced iron door at the far end. No one dared, that trip, no one would have died anyway. Now, as the stores were opened, it turned out that some one had packed the winter outfits at the very bottom. To get at them would take another seven days.

But on the seventh day, most of them were no longer wanted. For the blizzard of the next five days struck on the fourth day, when nothing was up but the revet poles, with the barbed wire stretched across. The typhoon struck on the sixth. The revolt of the fifth had died down by then.

(A young Swiss woman by the name of Thérèse Lippelet went as a Communist to Mexico in 1937. In 1938, she was sent without trial to her first camp at Magdalena. She spent the next eleven years in twenty-one different camps, transit camps and prisons. In the spring of 1941, she was at the Magdalena Criminal Infirmary when the survivors of Valeriy Iski's expedition to Gaudy Bight were brought in: two hundred Ice Citizens out of eight hundred, and out of six thousand one hundred prisoners there remained one hundred and fifty. Some of those three hundred and fifty got away with amputated limbs. Most of them died of sepsis.)

Not all that fun may come to think of it. What made Borodin roar with laughter was just that typhoon, those horses in the typhoon. "The horses," he roared, "wait, Citizen, I'll show you how those horses——"

Toboggen said "I know a man in a camp once who wanted to be a horse——"

"No," said Borodin, waving away the interruption, "I'll show you how those horses——"

"That man," Toboggen said stubbornly, with a drunkard's sobriety, "that man, when they drove us out to work in the permanent night of winter at five in the morning to fell trees, and they wouldn't send out animals because who can replace an animal?—so that man handed an application to the Commandant to be transferred to the status of a horse."

"A horse," said Borodin. "Wait, I'll show you——"

Toboggen said, "I will not go back. I will not go back."

Borodin said, "I'll show you how those mad horses in the typhoon——!"

Toboggen's face had grown white. He whispered, "I will not go back!"

CHAPTER XVI

SEEN from the platform down there, where the official reception was in progress, it was like this. Party Secretary Gorbakov being ill with fish, and Commandant Borodin having mysteriously vanished from the face of the earth, and Tretjak, being averse from public appearances (which was a remnant from days long past when he was still climbing the low rungs of the Ministry), there was some uncertainty at first as to who was to greet and introduce the distinguished foreigner. Locals, evidently, were too small fry.

There was of course Citizen Yakut, and steadfast he looked as he stood there on the platform, erect and scowling, relapsed into statuesque dignity. Now he even produced a handkerchief, flashed it open for all to see with one elegant shake—he represented a National Group which, though still a little backward, was up and coming!—and put the unfolded, impeccably clean cultural implement over the back of his half lifted, half outstretched hand. There was no doubt that they all held their breath observing him; a paralysing fascination oozed from the procedure; and now, scowling with the pride of the self-possessed, and only slightly assisting the process with one finger of his other hand, he cleared his nose into the far-away handkerchief with one well-aimed blow. He must have spent many a lonely hour training himself to it; and one like to think that he did so with set jaw; a lonely sentinel, scanning with eagle's eyes the deserted sea, or Arctic plains, whichever the case may be. It sounded like a small pistol-shot. Mr. Walter M. Watkins, for instance, gave a slight start.

They had not let him sleep. They had given him due warning upon arrival. He had been welcome to have a rest, but duty called. He had dressed as carefully as he could, out of the scant luggage he had taken along for this escapade up North; much as he would have dressed, say, for an ordinary sitting of the Senate. He felt himself out of place; as he had felt that time in Louisiana, when his second wife insisted on his presence at one of the village meetings she was wont to arrange, in that little burgh next to their ranch, for the preservation or salvation of something or somebody.

They seemed to be uncertain here as to who was going to introduce him. (Bob Smith ought to have taken a hand in this!) But now that man Bebitz, whom he respected and mistrusted (reserving judgment as to which of the two more, and why altogether—or was it because there was something afoot between that man and the interpreter, without his being able so far to fathom exactly what it amounted to)—now, then, this man Bebitz took the stage all right, and his name, he could understand that; “Amerikanski” too, that was just about how far his knowledge of Russian went. (That fool, his boy, Asa, could really be of some little help; where was he, anyway?) And here he said, “President.”

They took to it warmly. As for the reaction of audiences, Mr. Walter M. Watkins knew what was what. Look at their eyes. They liked whatever the speaker told them about the foreigner. They liked him. He liked their liking him. It was probably the eighth or twelfth performance of the sort they had dragged him into, this trip, and he liked their liking him better every time. It warmed the cockles of his heart to be liked for once—selflessly, as it were, not for the sake of a campaign. How long was it that he had not been liked for his own sake? The stray thought ambled through his mind as he looked into their heavy alien faces and true blue eyes. He started, as the interpreter—and she so neat and clear and clean at this late hour—looked up to him and said, “Now you.”

Ah, he knew what to say, of course. He had found the right tone of speaking to these Russian people from the very start. From the second occasion, to be exact, when his own man fell ill and this interpreter took over. (And maybe he had not addressed the Soviet People ever since—the thought ambled across his mind—but had addressed her?) “Now you,” she said.

He stepped forward, and in his alien language, which flew out like a lonely bird into the silence of their listening, he said, “Ladies and gentlemen——”

“Tovarichi,” the Interpreter Ursula Toboggana interpreted, clear-voiced.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said, “I have come to you, after a consultation with my friend the President of the United States of America——”

“——however hard,” she translated, reading the words from his

lips in great earnest, "the President tried to counsel me otherwise——"

"——to extend to you," he went on, looking into her eyes, and the thought ambled through his mind: what fluency, what good, clear flow, and it was a great and moving experience for a man no longer young to have the unclean and earthbound product of his brains translated into this ringing bell "To extend to you," he repeated, with a great effort forcing his mind back to his task, "our good will, and our admiration." He paused, to let her catch up with him.

She did "Our good will," she said, unmoved and clear as a bell, "in spite of our administration."

There was applause, ah, there was the applause again, he thought, thanks to you, my bell, you have made them applaud me nine times at this very word. He went on aloud, "We are a great and proud nation——"

"He says that we are a great and proud nation," she interpreted coolly——

"——but never proud of them when you gave us a chance to extend our help——"

"——our help," she said.

He said, "Lend-Lease——"

She said, "Stalingrad."

The Citizen Honoured Technician Toboggena had said it quickly, and with an angel face. He looked up, all the same. Stalingrad? Ah, there was the applause again; ah, he must have misunderstood. Oh angel face, he thought; and finished, "Thus we together won the war."

"He says——" Ah, unnecessary to dwell on a little difference. There was the applause again, the applause, and the man thought, it is thanks to you.

It was during the time of questions put to the enchanted traveller by his audience—questions as to why American workers did not revolt against the slave-drivers who kept them starving in filthy hovels; questions pleasantly transformed, and leading to those replies which, ruthlessly touched up with the lightest touch, roused the whole company's assurance that the American Nation could indeed rely on Soviet workers' aid to break their shackles—it was

at that stage, then, of applause creating yet more applause, that the ludicrous incident took place. In spite of what was said later, it was never ascertained that it was really Toboggen, having accepted a glass or two from Borodin, who led on the unfortunate Commandant. There was no need for Borodin to be led on by anyone. He was utterly drunk. And it was reasonable to presume that he would never have got himself into that state had he not despaired beforehand. Somebody, his expansive Slav soul told him, was going to have his head chopped off on the occasion of the visit of all these bigwigs; it was as inexorable as the slaughter of a sheep or goat at the arrival of a tribal chief; and who was to be the goat if not the locally responsible citizen? The alternative, Gorbakov, Party Secretary, had stolen a march on him, being ill with fish, and he knew why. At least he was going to have his fling and die in beauty; in vodka, rather. His turning to the memory of Vishnevetski, his late superior, was only logical; that great man too had been sacrificed for nothing; for next to nothing, really. For a typhoon. And the horses in that typhoon? Ah, brother, he felt a great urge to explain how they charged right and left madly, and then—

The noise must have been audible to some in the audience for quite some time; what covered it was then sustained applause. Now the large Stalin portrait up there—it was a placard, made of paper—burst, and framed by it there appeared the head of the unhappy drunken man. Ah, brother, he was a charging horse!

Later (much later, in connection with some quite different incident) it was put to him in interrogation that he had chosen deliberately a particular part of the picture to stick his head through. It was the stomach. And why, he was asked by relays of questioners, why just the stomach, what did he propose to hint at or convey by singling out this particular region which, as one of the prosecutors pointed out to him (or shall we say, yelled into his face?) was as dear to Soviet citizens as any other part? But that means taking things out of their right order; and it was unjust anyway. There was just a typhoon on. Borodin was just a horse.

"Lifted into the air," he roared, "and dropped, plop, plop, plop, into the sea!" His eyes were more sly than the rest of his countenance, and looked desperate. "Five thousand Kontriks," he

shouted, "and what did it avail them that they were culturists wearing spectacles? Plop, plop, plop." Yes, his eyes knew better. He roared, "And next week, Citizens, when we shall all be handed over to the Americans——"

The rest was inaudible. They had all stared at the drunken man for one second, then they had turned away and started chatting with each other, white-faced. They just did not hear. They just were not there when this happened. It just did not happen. Some, quite a few, many, felt a sudden urge to step outside. The six-seater in the yard, with air flush, was crowded a second later, with a waiting queue. The man in there was still yelling.

It was Senior Foreign Trade Specialist Bebitz who saved the situation, giving that sign to the brass band. It struck up a tune. This dance tune drowned the unhappy Commandant's voice. They started dancing immediately. Those in the yard, their urge forgotten, trooped back. There was white-faced merry-making right, left, fore, aft. A minute later a large hand, the hand of a one-eyed sergeant of the Forces of Inner Security, appeared up there and steadied itself before the inaudibly yelling mouth, and jerked the apparition on the balcony out of sight.

"Merry-making," Bebitz said to Mr. Walter M. Watkins, smiling blandly. "Shall we step somewhere else?"

He had to repeat his question. In the eyes of the American something had woken up. Yes, he seemed quite awake now, suddenly.

CHAPTER XVII

At that minute, Father Calv was still in the back room of his cabin that he had furnished as a chapel. The outburst of music from over there in Poshansk a mile away—was it from the assembly hall?—must have drowned the noise of his little bell. Yes, he had started ringing the alarm, three minutes ago, or five at most, but to him it seemed a long time. It was not a heavy bell, but then he was not a heavy man; the bell rope lifted him up and carried him down to prostration on the moist floor—and dragged him up again; he and his cassock had not had such physical exertion mixed out to them in their living days. He did not intend to stop ringing; his hands slipped, and there he lay panting, prostrate, a man so utterly exhausted that it took him minutes to recover enough to drag himself to the altar step.

He was the Roman Catholic priest, deported up to the Siberian wastes along with his Wolga German community and force-settled among its survivors about Poshansk. He had acted the moment he heard of the arrival of his Protestant colleague and old adversary, whose community was settled thirty or fifty miles away. Why did he come? Why with his wife? And in what way was it all connected with the alleged arrival of some Americans—that rare link with the outer world, that spectacular opportunity? Ah, the priest had ample reason to be alarmed—to ring the alarm. There he knelt now and prayed. Thus praying, he intended to be found by his congregation, whom he had summoned, with whom he must consult.

He was born at the lower Volga bank, as a smallholder's son, and a second son at that. He had always been weak of body and visited by dreams, which he attributed to the Evil One, until he came to regard them as a call. Send me out as a missionary: so he interceded with his superiors; anywhere North, South, East. But his was too troublesome a body, they felt, and probably too troublesome a mind. Temptations, vanity, even sensuousness were still rife in him, as his father confessor knew. The young ecclesiastic acquiesced in the refusal and settled down, for a decade. When the

Bólsheviks rose to power, he asked once more; he had had dreams again; protect from all evil our Holy Church!

This time his plea was granted. Those who had not been crushed in the first years of triumph of Antichrist had been allowed a precarious existence, on the fringe of the law, on the fringe of social life, half clandestine, yet hourly scrutinized by the authorities, living on half-clandestine, voluntary contributions by a congregation that were afraid or ashamed to raise their head. He was in the end deported with them when war broke out. And the rest of his herd reaching the district of Poshansk had been eighty-six men, women, children. There were twenty-nine left by now.

Yes, Father Calv thought as he lay there on his knees waiting for them and praying, yes, there are twenty-nine, my Lord Jesus Christ, but if the parson, the heretic, were to ask me, I would tell him that there are thirty-one, and it would be a lie. Your own priest is driven into lying by the Godlessness of these times and by his own vanity, which would make him count the two children of Thy sheep, Anna Maria Megele and Pauline Stolz, and the said children still unborn and unbaptized and not yet to be counted but by a liar. And that is Thy priest, but I shall now turn to them as they come in, and humble myself before them, and tell them: Thus far can man be corrupted by Godless times, and by banishment into these Far Eastern districts of the outcasts. For this was not Russia. This was not even the Soviet Union but its foul end, the wastage spewed out by its entirely the criminals. The traitors. The broken. Even the Red Authority, ruthless and Godless elsewhere but brutally incorrupt, was here corrupted and profited on death and misery.

What a world, thought the praying priest; what a world in which even the religious had to pay bribes to the police, protection money, to be permitted a chapel and a bell. Though it was not for the first time in the history of God's Holy Church that His priest could raise his head only among the outcasts. And even so—that was how he would address his congregation—even so, it might well be that this was the day of reckoning, *dies iue, dies illa*. Therefore, my sons and daughters, let us walk out and challenge the Protestant, but first *oremus*, humbly on our knees, *bremus*.

He was still kneeling; there praying, ten minutes later, and was

still alone. None, not one of his congregation had come. Where are they, Father Calv thought, while his lips muttered the holy sentences. Where are they, have they deserted their Creator, or has their Creator abandoned them and they are already ravaged and done to death? He felt that his heart was a traitor to the prayer that was on his lips. He stopped and rose abruptly, to step into the doorway of the chapel and look outside. The village over there, a mile away, lay noiseless but for the music spewed out by a single house, and the barking here and there of a lonely dog. He looked across and thought of the Herr Pastor over there at the hotel; gobbling, probably; and the blasphemy of having a wife and calling himself a priest. He, Calv, had not had a bite since noonday, and that a small helping of cabbage soup. He had taken a vow never to apply to his parishioners' dwindling means again; and the vegetable patch desperate on the barren soil, and he a poor gardener.

He felt a sharp pain in his stomach, the pain he had had for months. Maybe it was not just his hunger, maybe it was the Lord Himself touching him with His little finger and saying, Up, up, My son Calv, it's about time for you to pass on. "It shall be as Thou desirest," he muttered as he lant there in the chapel doorway, bent in his cramp. "And once this cramp releases me from its grip, I shall leave the hut and walk across to challenge the Protestant, and on my way there I shall see why Anna Maria Megede has not come, and two houses farther down I shall knock at the window of Balchin the tailor, and right across from him is the cottage of Gohl, and my anger will be on their heads, a priest's white fury against those who desert Jesus Christ - the moment this cramp releases me."

When twenty minutes later the artiste Wanda Miranda approached his hut, he was no longer leaning in the doorway. He had moved away once, out into the night, to vomit, and had returned and gone inside.

The artiste had left the back room of the Cultivat a few minutes after the end of Mr. Asa P. Watkins's abortive contact with the Masses, represented by herself and the older woman who kept her company. The two ladies went to the drapery room they had been given at the hotel. No sooner were they there than there was a knock at the door. It was that German fellow, Schwankov, or

Schwanneke, who had been after her ever since her release from camp. Only the authority of the Apparatchik had checked him for a few hours; but there he was again, the moment he heard that she was no longer in the Apparatchik's room. The older woman, on her instruction, went outside in the corridor to send the man away; both men—there was another deaf-mutely lurking at the far end of the landing.

The artiste was not generally afraid of a gentleman, was she now? Or of two of them. But of this pair she was afraid. Ah, she was so afraid of them, and couldn't say why; it was so silly.

Outside in the corridor, the elder woman was saying, "She isn't inside, I tell you; I don't know where she is." She said it, and was not believed. "Maybe gone to the Commandant's wife," she went on, "because of the embroidery she did for her in camp, and she never paid for it." Ah, he did not believe her, the artiste heard behind the door, trembling. And she not generally trembling because of a gent, was she now? The man outside threatened to go round and have a look, at the Commandant's, just to see if the artiste was really there; he'd always have an excuse to walk in and see, and if she wasn't there, and if by any chance the two women were fooling him and the young one this very moment probably inside listening, he'd be back in a few minutes, and then——!

"And then what?" the older woman said, challenging.

"Then," the man shouted (yes, he was shouting suddenly), "then we'll see!" He yelled, "Every single nut in this bloody burgh will be taught a lesson, inside two hours!"

Well, he withdrew then, threatening to come back in a minute or two. He did not come back, in fact, until nearly half an hour thereafter. His mood had changed. He was still wild, but quiet. He came with two bottles of vodka, which he had stolen from the pantry. Wanda was not at the Commandant's, he said quietly; therefore she was here, inside. And will they now see reason? The Apparatchik gone, and he, Schwankov, with money in his pocket, and all he wanted was to sit down with the ladies for an educated chat with a glass of vodka like a gentleman. Considering, just listen, considering the world was going to pieces that night anyway, just listen, do you know what that is, that's an alarm bell out at the chapel of the Catholics.

He said all that in a quiet voice, and the old woman could by then afford to offer to take him over the room inside, to prove to him that Wanda wasn't there. Quieter still, almost whispering, he said, "I'll find her. I'll catch up with her." His eyes were strangely sightless; you could not catch their glance. He turned, forgetting his two bottles, and left, stumbling, without another word.

Wanda had indeed left by then; in a turmoil of panic; taking nothing along except what she called her jewels; after a wild and aimless five minutes' row with the older one, who tried to reason with her and to hold her back. (And why was she so panicky anyway? You'd think she was a virgin. There were some men who were quite gentlemen, even Russians. Think of the Hotz that time down in Rumania who was nearly married to one only he got transferred; think of the Potz; think of the Kutz, they did rape her, but then they said, *Nicht weinen, Frau*, Don't cry, Lady, and gave her twenty-seven watches.)

So the actress Wanda Miranda was by then on the run. Indeed, she had been on the run, zig-zagging through the few lanes of Poshansk, for half an hour before she reached the chapel of Father Calv.

She heard him speak to someone in his room, and was too panicky to disturb him; but the back room they called a chapel next door was not locked. She stepped inside, and crossed herself, and knelt. Oh You, my Lord Jesus Christ. Oh save me from this fear. Oh my sweet Virgin. She felt that she could not concentrate in prayer, and got up and went outside. She saw the priest's shadow on the curtain of his room—he had put on the paraffin lamp—and the shadow of a hefty man whom she did not at first recognize. She stepped up to the door.

"So, as things begin to happen," she heard the visitor say inside, breezily, yet respectfully, "I felt I had just time to do something for my immortal soul. My principle, when things begin to happen. Am I right, Father? I shouldn't have gone to the Protestant over in the hotel even if he had a church in the place, which he hasn't. Always go to the Roman Catholics. It's the real religiousness they have—am I right? I am a religious man."

"The chapel is next door," she heard Father Calv say quietly. The man laughed. "I looked inside. One look. It isn't heated."

Father Calv said nothing.

The man said, "My philosophy is, as a religious man, I want a religion with saints. And with the Virgin Mary. It isn't human otherwise, is it, if our Lord isn't the son of—how can he be a God if his mother isn't a Virgin? See what I mean? As a religious man, that is my philosophy why I am a believing Catholic."

There was a long silence. Then Father Calv's voice was audible, altered and very quiet. "Kneel down. Yes, kneel down. I say, kneel down! Let us pray together." He looked up for a moment. There had been footsteps outside. Yes, there were fleeting footsteps, withdrawing quickly. All of a sudden, the artiste had recognized the voice. She fled, she fled.

(Someone standing outside Calv's hut in the darkness, looking after her deaf-mutely, without an expression on a face that looked as if built of clay, saw her zig-zagging, in panic, back to the village of Poshansk.)

She reached it ten minutes later. Her plan, even then, must have been to seek shelter at her client's, the Commandant's wife; and she saw the back windows of the hotel, with Borodina's room on the first floor, fifty or eighty yards across, up the street. But she did not have it in her to cross that street, which at that moment lay there utterly deserted. She stood there, breathless. Nearby, a window was dimly lighted. Ah, the Staprodise shop still open, she registered in her mind with some surprise; it had been kept open to be inspected by the American. She had no right to step in there and buy; it was the shop reserved for the bigwigs; but this was not an ordinary night. Also, she could see that it was not the Citizen Gorbakov sitting in there, nor his wife—had they been called away?—but a woman she did not know. Was she not afraid, sitting in there alone like that?

She stepped inside. The woman behind the counter was a force-settler's wife whom they had called in for an hour to mind the shop. They had brought her husband from Poland, promising him a farm. And what sort of a farm? This would was one great puzzle. There she sat with her puzzled and worried face; life had ridden over it roughshod and had trampled it into a mould of meanness. She started as if the customer coming in were Death in person.

The artiste felt a little better when she saw the woman. There was someone even more frightened and miserable than herself. She came in with a grand sweep of her pretty haunches, like a lady, and said haughtily, without greeting, "Any nail varnish? Ox-blood red."

The woman, the temporary shop manageress, looking at her with flustered hen's eyes, said, "She didn't tell me of no varnishes. Coloured pencils for 'kiddies, that's all." (Nail varnish. Did they paint their nails? Who?)

The young one said, "Coloured pencils. You can't find any nail varnish in this hole." She waved with the stiff black little fence of sticks that were her lashes, and asked, "What does a lady do hereabouts with the nails of her hands and feet? In a real place, say Moscow, or Galatz, or Vienna—!" She stopped. She saw the woman was looking at her lips. Her lips were trembling. She stopped, all of a sudden, and sat down on the single stool in the narrow shop.

The woman was so white underneath her eyes it looked silly. She said, "No 'Kiddies' coloured pencils, that's all. Green and yellow, that's all there is. Want to see them? Red is sold out." She paused. "Blue too." It looked ill, her old haggard lips and not a drop of blood in them.

The customer, sitting there, made a movement of ladylike exasperation. She dropped the subject. Stretching out her hand, with all the jewels on them, all three rings (the engagement ring too, from *that* time; she had hidden it victoriously all through her life in camp; and he in that letter having the nerve to ask her to send it back, that time home in Rumina, but she didn't as a matter of principle. "I shall keep it as a memento of the numerous meals I paid for you," she wrote)—stretching out her bejewelled hand towards the counter, she said (and heard herself saying it in an artificial, stiltedly high voice), "Got any illustrated papers? Just want to see if there's maybe a picture of me again, because only the other day a gent said, I mean to say, a citizen—"

She started. Someone was coming down the street. A man's step. He passed. They looked into each other's faces. The haggard one said, with bloodless lips, "I'd better turn down the lamp."

By that time out there in Calv's hut, the priest and his visitor no longer prayed. The man, on his knees, had started speaking. "So I said to my men," he said, strangely eyeless, with a heavy tongue, "so I said to my men, you swine, I said, I thought you'd know better than listen to alarm and despondency because of a few lousy Americans and British landing thousands and thousands of miles away in Normandy; they're probably all killed by now; and do you know how we dealt with alarm and despondency in the good old days when we first came in, 1941? See, Father? In the street, Bialystok suburb. And at the other side civilians passing, they were that trustful by then, and cocky. So I say I'll show you, and a young man with a girl just passing by at the other side, so I just cock my finger to him—like this—come! I see he stops, and gestures over to me: what, me? So I gesture: yes, you. So I see he says to the girl, just pardon me a moment, and comes over. Smiling too, like a misunderstanding. Young chap with a pince-nez. And the girl waiting at the other side. So I say to him, with my finger cocked, just come right here, you're going to hang! And he——"

The priest sat there, his head bent, his face covered with his hands. He said nothing, he did not move.

The man on his knees said, "That pince-nez, see? Bookworms, am I right? I don't like them with pince-nez. They can't look you straight in the eye." He got up clumsily. The priest sat there motionless. The man said in a flat voice, "I stepped on that pince-nez, later, by accident. Crack. Like this. Crack. Nasty sound." He stared at the priest, and fumbling for his wallet he said unsteadily, "That's why you don't see the pince-nez in the picture."

The deaf-mute, outside.

When, a few minutes later, Citizeness Gorbakova came home and entered the shop of the Staprolic, she found the Polish woman sitting up in darkness by the extinguished fuel lamp.

The customer had left.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE back of the hotel lay there deserted. Mr. Asa P. Watkins hesitated. He did not know which was which. One window had an uncertain light behind it. To reach it, he had to encroach on the privacy of a back-yard. The curtain was not drawn. It was the hotel organizer's parlour, which, along with his room above, he had loaned for the occasion to the Camp Commandant and his wife. It was furnished with a few pensioned-off padded chairs—Vladivostok comforts of yesteryear brought up into the wilderness. The pantry seemed to be leading off it. Its door was open. Borodina, Cultural Propagator, was standing in it, turned away, looking inside.

In the hectic scene of great emotions a few hours ago, when he met her first and received his mission in the corridor leading back from the six-seater in the yard, Asa P. had been too deeply stirred to look at this woman detachedly. Ever since, time and again, he had tried to evoke her features before his inner eye, and could not. Only a minute ago, while he was walking up the dark street to breathe the air and regain self-control after that disappointing contact with the Masses in the shape of Wanda Miranda, artiste, and her alleged mother, he had stopped for a second and thought, what colour eyes, what style her hair, and was it really of the luscious darkness he seemed to remember, and if this were daylight and she coming round the corner maybe he would not recognize her.

The woman standing there in the room was disconcertingly beautiful. He was not generally given to contemplating that sort of beauty. He had educated his aesthetic sense on Hellenic lines. Yes, this was indeed disconcerting. He had not remembered that her figure was quite so Junoesque. She wore a *peignoir*, lavishly quilted and embroidered with what must be the most fashionable floral ornaments in the Soviet style; you could see at a glance how eligible the garment was to comfort the noble limbs, whose generous shape hinted itself, breathtakingly unmistakable, through the pliable and caressing material; a *peignoir* not to be compared

with the shoddy products of the sort they produced in the United States; that one, for instance, the Pirate insisted on wearing when he was at home. It was Mr. Asa P. Watkins's unwavering adherence to Socialist aesthetics, his Socialist aesthetic virginity, so to speak—in spite of the cheap lures of a Monopolo-Capitalist upbringing—that morally entitled him to stand out here in the dark and contemplate the luscious beauty of this woman, himself so far unobserved.

Aesthetics, yes; it was an aesthetic field so far unexplored by him. Was it by any chance merely the hollowness and depravity of American womanhood that had forced him to take refuge in the Hellenic sphere? The thought was deeply, disturbing. One ought to discuss it with the Pirate—if matters of such subtlety could be discussed with him. (He was, if truth must be told, not very bright!) Socrates too—so Asa P. seemed to remember hazily—had, after all, a wife. Though not, of course, such a one.

As he contemplated her aesthetically standing there at the pantry door, the statuesque majesty of her breasts made him almost swoon. The hand, so complete and padded, and yet of a squeeze so powerful; oh, the recollection of his intimacy with this majestic hand. It was just being lifted to the majestic mouth (and oh, its intimacy with it), a mouth made doubly queenly by the two furrows of disdain drooping from its imposing edges; queenly, and yet not above accepting what that hand was just in the act of proffering, viz: a piece of what looked like a cookie out of a can, with just a gay little dash of canned cream on it. Her beautiful, heavy eyes were absorbed in thought, thinking of problems Socialist? Or metaphysical? Or looking inward, listening, as it were, for the melting echo of the taste of the piece of relish just admitted between the proud sadness that was her lips? Or was she really just wondering at some unexplained disturbance in the larder, into which she was still looking through the open door, and from which she had forgotten to withdraw the key when last entered two hours ago? It was the colossal humanized, the human ennobled to the dimensions of statuary marble that moved Asa P. Watkins deeply. The female symbol of the French Revolution might look like this; Pallas Athene; or the Statue of Liberty, misplaced at the port entrance of New York.

He knocked lightly at the window. He must: what if, believing herself to be unobserved, she were to resort to some intimacy with herself not destined for a spectator's eye? Stick her finger into her nose or something? It would be unbearable, even for a man with Socialist standards of honour, who would of course turn his gaze away at once. He knocked, she looked up slowly, recognized him, with a large woman's impassiveness, and let him in through the back entrance which was close at hand.

Without greeting him, she said, "Somebody took two bottles of vodka."

He nodded, inwardly. Yes, this was just like her. Her noble commiseration with her hapless husband in her mind, and (who knows?) the knightly mission laid on Asi P's own shoulders, and she probably burning to hear a progress report as to how he discharged himself of his task; but oh no, first and foremost she thinks of her duty, like the communal-minded and yet houseproud woman she was. The German poet knew. "And indoors busy the chaste *Hausfrau*, the mother of children." (Though—children? *Hausfrau* to whom?) There was a deeply symbolical tragedy hidden behind her houseproudness. "Two bottles of vodka"; just like that. He sensed the depth of it all and yet could not fathom it. He said, "He is safe."

She looked at him out of slow eyes. 'He is safe?' Who? Her husband the Commandant? Why should he not be safe? Though he was a drunkard. He seemed to have made himself guilty of some minor indiscretion at the reception in the Cultinst. He had not yet returned. But for his absence, the female would not have burst in on her; a female, a former prisoner, who had done some embroidery for her. Crazy with fear, of something or somebody.

She looked down, slow-eyed as a statue, at the plate with a last bite of cookie that she was still holding, and said, "A certain young female, an ex-prisoner—he burst in on me, she is out of her wits. Somebody would do something unspeakable to her. But my dear child, I said, you need only look at such a man—like this. Like a fearless Socialist! And none will dare touch you." She looked down at the piece of cookie and bethought herself. She said, "She is up in the room the hotel organizer cleared for us for the night, I took her up. She was so distressed, I thought I must go and fetch a piece of something for her. That is how I came down, and then——"

(And then I saw you, Minerva, he thought. And then, she thought, I saw two bottles missing, and out of absentmindedness I started eating the cookies myself.)

She said aloud, "Just this little piece. I shall bring it up to her." She stood close to him. With her free hand, the left one—the other one held the plate—she sought out his hand, and squeezed it. "You wait here," she said in an undertone, establishing a conspiratorial intimacy that took your breath away. "I shall just dash up and give her the cookie and send her away. Shan't be a minute."

She let go his hand, with a final squeeze, and turned to the domestic stairs. And oh, he thought, how she dashes up, how thin her ankles carrying her marble body upstairs dashing in gracious tiny hops like a dashing girl of seventeen. Minerva, he thought. His hand was hurting.

Upstairs, he heard her utter a little cry. A cry of surprise? Bending over the banister she called down to him in a whisper, "She is gone. Come up."

He did not quite understand, but went up in long strides, ready to stand by her in any emergency.

She stood there, taking up three-quarters of the minute landing. He had scarcely room to breathe, between her and the wall. She was taller than he by a head. She whispered down on him, "She must have gone this minute, while I was talking to you. She went by the other stairs. She was crazy, speaking all the time of somebody being after her. I wanted to make her comfortable with a bit of cookie, but she——" She was still holding the plate, and went on, "So you say there is no danger for my husband?—Hush," she admonished herself, and breathed down on him, quieter still, "the citizen hotel organizer is in the room next door, in bed. I can't take you inside." The points of her breasts were level with his chin; there was no space if he felt like swooning. She went on, "Crazy. She says she has been ravished back in that Capitalist country she comes from, at the age of twelve. That is why she is so crazy."

He said, "They are having a committee meeting, that is all."

"Is it?" she whispered.

He said, "Just the most important citizens, so of course your husband had to be invited to attend." Comforting her manfully. Not knowing really what it was all about.

She said nothing.

He said, "Just the few, and of course the interpreter, Ursula Toboggana."

"Ah," she said, bantering in a whisper. "Are you in love with her?"

His face was disdainful. He wanted to say something, several things really, but did not. And if I say it, he told himself, and if I open my mouth now, I shall stammer.

Her face was close above him. She did not smile. Maybe he would really have swooned now, had there been space. Unsmiling, she took a piece of cookie between her fingers and put it into his mouth. She whispered, "Little hero."

His mouth was full. Minerva, he thought, Minerva. He must first swallow. His mouth was full.

The hotel organizer's voice called out at that moment, two doors away. What was the matter, he asked with the complaining voice of a man in bed, was there somebody there, whom was the Citizeness Borodina talking to?

She took it impassively. She seized the young man's hand. Holding it firmly, she called out in a melodious voice, "The young American citizen is here."

How wonderful she was, Asa P. thought, swallowing. Steadfast and truthful. The young American is here, and that's that, put it in your pipe and smoke it. Minerva. Wonderful.

"What does he want?" The man in bed asked. The vulgar persistency of it.

Minerva, unruffled, said, still whispering, "Oh yes, what was I just telling you? Quite crazy. I am glad she is gone. If someone touches her, she says, if someone so much as touches her—"

"What does he want?" That was the man again.

She called back in her own time, melodiously, "Nothing." She turned to Asa P. again. "Go," she breathed down on him, letting his hand go with a final squeeze. And, "What was it again?— Oh yes. The woman. Crazy. If someone, she says, if someone so much as touches her, she will kill herself."

CHAPTER XIX

BEBITZ said, "You here, Comrade Tretjak? I've been looking for you all over the place. No, without any special reason. It is just that the situation calls for some thinking. We are not intimately acquainted, you and I. When did we meet first? Six days, five days ago. But I am used to thinking aloud, it is the right principle in certain matters. Why are you sitting here in the dark? You, too, sorting out your thoughts? An odd affair. What are you going to do with the Commandant? Madly drunk. Must not happen, of course. But as the American does not know the language, I should not make a big case of it, really. Well, that is up to you. No, don't bother to explain, just leave the talking to me. I am, honestly, not really interested in your—well, I am sorry, Comrade. Moscow megalomania. Make allowances for my nerves; I haven't been sleeping very much these last few weeks. A pleasant sight-seeing trip, you would think; showing an American visitor our Soviet sights. Ah, the headache of responsibility, even for a citizen who—but you Ministry men know about my position and connection in Moscow probably as much as I do myself. Or more. Right? Well, you wouldn't tell. Have you a cigarette? Thanks. There, look. Cannot hold the match, I am so tired. And why did that man Smith, Watkins's secretary, not put in an appearance but stayed up in the room, allegedly to snatch some sleep? As you see, I am affected by the atmosphere of all-round suspicion. It was good anyway that the son, that fool, was not there when it all happened. He does have a few words of Russian. I don't know where he was. Has he opened his heart to you? Don't make a report of it, he opened his heart to me five times; he is just a minny; you probably never met the type here, out East, so there is a danger that you might take him—you do take him seriously? I feared so. Don't. That is what some of our comrades look like, in the Western Democracies. Though it is what is to be expected, probably. What would a Western Democrat of Khabarovsk look like on a journey to the United States? Well, that will probably sound to you like seditious talk; you are not used to our Moscow ways. Speaking of temporary disappearances: have

you people seen Toboggen, this last hour? I gave him the run of the place. Deliberately. He must get into shape. It is agreed that we'll drop him later, but I must have him in shape for the next day or so—is that understood? You people have not snatched him by any chance and are holding him somewhere? Because I have been looking for him. Not far, to be sure. No fear. But the responsibility, the responsibility. Maybe you can oblige me with another of your *papyrossi*, Comrade? Thanks. Thanks. How they all scuttled, incidentally, when that madman of a Commandant did his turn. You know what I did? Of course you do—having your men at every corner of every room, I suppose. I out-mucked him! Because it looked to me for a moment as if the American were getting uneasy. What an extraordinary thing to say, by the way: we - we!—intending to hand over this country—just hand it over!—to the United States. With the camps, presumably. What simply stuns me, again and again, is our people's stupidity. I keep saying so—well, to somebody pretty high up who happens to be my friend—that the only way to stop this eternal crop of rumours is—well, the recipe would probably not be appreciated by you Ministry men at Khabarovsk. Forgive me my loquacity. Nave! Now how do you think it can have leaked out that we are after an American loan? For that is the basis of that rumour, surely? Where is the leak? That is your line, there is a security aspect in that—can't you find out? It can spoil the whole effort if— Is there nothing you know? Now, there is one thing I request of you, Comrad, don't be mysterious. I repeat: is there nothing you know? All right, you don't. All right. Why am I asking? I am asking because of a certain factor in the situation. Guess what? No, you'd probably think the leakage, if it reaches Walter M. Watkins's ears prematurely, might make him shy off. The danger is that he might not shy off even on the strength of the most disastrous leakages—or consequences of leakages—simply because he might be past being headed off by anything. Sounds undialectical to you? But think of that factor. Is it that the man—a bourgeois. A sentimentalist. He has fallen for—for the interpreter—so completely it will probably be incomprehensible to you, looked at from Khabarovsk. We men at the centre are nearer to grasping the Western mind. Not a pleasant thing to grasp, admitted, but there you are. Such a Weygerner would even in the

midst of—important missions—fall for such a—a young thing! I am certainly disinclined to speak of this particular young citizen disparagingly—you know that, you wouldn't be a Ministry man not to know—but would a responsible Marxist-Leninist Socialist, a grown-up human being, allow such a—⁶privately emotional arabesque—to interfere with—a Mission, Comrade! This isn't catching butterflies! Ah, I am probably, expressing myself incoherently. All the more so as I am accusing myself of being responsible for it all. Not only for the scheme at large but for the—I called it the 'factor', I think. I ought to have known better, having studied the Western mind. I—did not look askance at—I held her out to him, admitted—so as to improve the atmosphere. Well, admitted, I was not altogether unconnected with the small accident of ill-health that befell his own interpreter in the first few days of—or let me say, your opposite number of the Ministry out West was not quite unconnected *Mea culpa, mea culpa*—as a priest would probably exclaim, beating his chest. What I fear, simply and bluntly, is this that this man Watkins's blindness—willingness to see our point—will last exactly as long as his enchantment. Do you see now? What is going to happen the moment she breaks—the enchantment? As she must. Do you see? As she must, of course. Do you now see?"

Tretjak said nothing.

Bebitz stepped up to the window, in the dark room. Moonlight shone outside, the night was very clear. Stalin Boulevard lay there deserted.

He said, "You security chips are the craziest people in the world. That maypole out there. When that revolt broke out three years ago, up in the tundra beyond Indigarka—those three camps—they signalled to each other with burning trees. Well, you people extinguished that—fire—in the three camps effectively. Somebody—pretty high up in Moscow—showed me the secret report. He was much impressed. At least until we got to know, by means of—some other channels—that it was a put-up job. Certainly, why not? Kontriks. Why not use *agents provocateurs*? Certainly. Most laudable. Your business, we don't want to look into those matters too closely—within limits. Certainly. Only, once you people get hold of a trick, you just won't let go. Ever since, every likely isolated tree,

every maypole with a bit of resin on it—sort of a taboo to you all. You don't touch them. I suspect you even erect them—only to have a chance to stand by and watch? Only, a taboo is—infectious. You know, and the prisoners in the camps know too. Stand by and watch. The torch of revolt! That's how you are checkmating yourself in your own game."

Tretjak said nothing.

CHAPTER XX

MR. WALTER MAYFLOWER WATKINS said, "That you, Citizen Interpreter? Good. I have been looking for you. Admiring the moon, or just getting out of my way? Ah' right, let us stop here in the moonshine. No, don't go away. I have to talk to you. Ah no, you will listen, this time. Isn't that your official job? I haven't said yet that it is going to be private. It isn't, in a sense. Though in a sense it is going to be very private indeed, Ursula. Yes, I'm going to call you Ursula, this moonshine hour; whatever I may be calling you afterwards. Pending that, is it asking too much, if I ask you just to stay quiet and listen for—say, twenty minutes? You will do that? Don't worry, you are welcome to tell 'em every word later, if you must. You will listen, then? Good. Now, let me speak first about certain feelings. Just to put matters into the right perspective. Don't worry; it is just part of the business I am going to discuss with you. Now, you are a very, very young woman, a girl really, you could be my daughter, my grand-daughter, at a pinch—which is incidentally in our bourgeois civilization a trick of elderly suckers like myself to gain a young girl's confidence, so better be careful—confidence, or make her sit up anyway and realize that her bread is buttered this side; but you wouldn't understand that, so disregard it. I say, you are very, very young, and very, very—alien to me, with those war decorations pinned on your blouse; I don't know how you got them, what's more, I don't want to know really. But you are a young woman all the same, and even a Soviet young woman can't be so different at least in this respect that beyond—high aims and tasks and ideologies—she could misread—well, yes, what I am feeling for you, Ursula. All right, then. I love you. There it is. Now you must know that in our bourgeois civilization that statement is made easily. Easily and yet uneasily, if you get me, but you won't. Easily by a youngster wanting to gild a desire—well, at least *that* desire is likely to be the same in your world. Uneasily by a man my age. Very uneasily indeed. You see, in my sort of world—I don't know about yours—making exactly that statement makes the man who utters it look foolish. Well, say, unless he is

a college boy, a young lieutenant—or, well, in the films of course it is different. But for a man my age, and of my—position—to say such a thing just makes him look a fool; one who goes in for the discomforts of an amorous situation—great physical discomforts indeed for a man with a settled life—let alone the financial discomforts, breach of promise actions, and the various state laws—we have different laws in our single states as to how and how far you may or may not unwittingly drive across a state frontier with a woman not your wife—well, it's all for the lawyers, and why not, I am a lawyer myself—and, later, of course, the discomforts of divorce, of alimony, of—ah, enough, enough. In other words, a man my age who utters the cold statement that he loves another party is either a sucker—a term they won't have taught you in your good, honest Socialist language school—even Victim of Monopol-Capitalist Exploitation wouldn't quite fit the case—or else he is very, very serious about it and has weighed his word. You see what my world is like? These are the lengths of speech a man has to go to so as to create a chance of belief for his flat statement: I love you, and I mean it. And, Ursula, you can safely cut out the alternative assumption: that I may be a fool after all. The stress I am laying on that is again typical for my civilization. There is no greater fear in an American citizen than that of being made a fool of. No kidding. If you can be kidded, you are either a kid—or old. You mustn't be old! That's why we are on the alert against attempts at kidding, all the time. Do you get me? That's why—no, you won't go now, Ursula. You stay right here. That's not too high a price to pay, is it, for having kidded me over interpreting my speech tonight? Yes. I noticed. At last. Having noticed only at the ninth performance—maybe I'm really getting old? I could never utter that doubt in front of, say, my friend Bob Smith, though he is on my pay-roll, but I can say to you—and, as I said, you will stay right here and listen to my loquacity, that's the price you pay for having been found out. Though you did it nicely; I'll give you a testimonial to that effect, for your superiors. Only, why translate Lend-Lease as Stalingrad? No, don't answer now. Let me forget about it. Though having learned to look through the other party's technique of kidding would in my civilization be regarded as the first prerequisite for a happy—no, let me wash that sentence off the slate, if

is cynical. If there is one thing you people aren't—you ordinary Soviet people, I mean—it is cynical. Forgive me, then. Only one more question—speaking of kidding—before I forget it. I am not talking about the Moscow Underground. It is real. I know that. It's the only thing I was primed on back home before I left. I know, too, that it is four miles long, incidentally. Not forty, as you said, impudently, with your angel's face. As I said, I am not talking about that. Nor about the skyscraper it—what was the name of the place again? Omsk? Tomsk? The doors didn't fit. Not a single door. They were left-hand doors, put upside down on right-hand hinges. I am not holding that against you. Nor that you said—how did you explain it to me, when I seemed to notice? I wrote it down, I've got it in my notebook, I can't look it up now. Putting that impudent little nose of yours in to the tin, you said: Soviet scientists have discovered that doors must be put in correctly in the sense of the rotation of the earth! It is complete bunkum. I let it pass. You know why, now. Because of the emotional situation which had by then arisen—to talk the way you talk. No, stop. I just mentioned it at random, it is not what I wanted to ask you, really. What I want to ask is regarding that store up here you all showed me over, a few hours ago. What do you call it? Stupisk? Stupodich? The manager was down with food-poisoning. And what I want to know is if it was your own idea to re-label those cans for my benefit. All Russian produce. Plenty of it, every type of food. Impressive. Quite a new big flourishing industry we never heard of in the United States. And the moment I took one of those cans—remember? Of course you do. You didn't like it. Visibly. The moment I took it down and looked at the bottom of the can—for you see, Ursula, I may be a sucker in certain matters of an emotional character, but once it comes to cans—they were American Lend-Lease cans, re-labelled at the last moment for my benefit. Heaven knows how you got by those labels in a hurry and—But hey, stop. Where was it again you showed me over a food store last time? And last but one time, where they had those sticks of beautiful Russian—? I say, do you carry those labels in your luggage, all the way from Moscow, and hand them out wherever we make a stop? Do you? I want you to tell me. Do you? All right, don't tell me. The only thing that interests me is, was that your own idea, or that man Bebitz's, who

is so blandly efficient otherwise? Some brains. I can smell that. Brilliant, in a sense. That's why I am asking. If it was your own idea—all right, it's brazen impudence, but all right. But if it was he—the question arises, what is he up to? What does he want me to believe? He can't want me to believe, surely, that they are so well off here, producing all they want, that they don't need any more assistance from the United States? For if he'd wanted—for he does want something of me, only I haven't figured out yet what it is—I say, if he'd wanted assistance from the United States his move would be idiotic. And I don't like that citizen particularly; for my taste, you take too much interest in him—yes, I mean you—but he isn't an idiot, oh no, he isn't an idiot. Nor is it deceit for deceit's sake, I mean just your national principle that the foreigner mustn't know what's what anyway. Bebitz is above that. The police chap, Tretjak, would play that game of hiding for hiding's sake. Bebitz's game must be different. If he shows me all that national well-being and prosperity, and at the same time wants something from me, or from us—— Ah. A loan? Would it be a loan? Showing themselves worthy of credit? For in that case, what would they want to give us in pawn for it? Wait a minute, wait a minute. Leading me up here into—this frozen district of Kolyma country—— Gold? No. If they have the gold they don't want me any longer. Therefore—the gold still in the soil? Why don't they tell me? Because one mustn't tell anyway, because it would be too simple, or what? They want to pawn the mines! Clear, isn't it? That silly gossip, the Amerikanski taking over, up here—yes, I know that too: my bright young son was good enough for once to oblige with a translation; he heard it shouted, and came up to me outraged, and wanted my solemn oath that I shall never, never——! I forget what. *Some* solemn oath. Well, all that clicks into position now, doesn't it? You oughtn't to have made that mistake with Lend-Lease and Stalingrad; it has woken me up! They want to pawn the Kolyma mines and I am the last man, evidently, to hear about it, and even that only thanks to my thinking aloud for—it's just twenty minutes. Owing to an emotional situation which——" He interrupted himself and asked, "Who goes there?"

Bebitz, stepping nearer, said, "Good evening. Oh, I am intruding."

Ursula said, "You are not."

Bebitz said: "I am, surely. Enjoying the moonshine?"

"No," said Ursula.

Bebitz said, "I just happened to pass. I am looking for your father, Ursula. You don't know by any chance——?"

"Her father?" said the American.

Bebitz, smiling white-toothed in the moonlight, said, "Antoni Maximovich Toboggen. The name would not mean anything to you."

"Not the great Toboggen?" Mr. Walter M. Watkins had started. He had been a student, among other subjects, of modern history, in those far-away years at Yale, and he was no fool anyway. "I always wanted to ask—the interpreter—if there was any relationship, but then, one never knows what one may ask, considering you people with you——" He stopped. And thought. And said, "No. Can't be."

"Can't be?" said Bebitz. "Why?"

"I remember now. He was——"

There was a short pause.

Bebitz, smiling, said, "Executed? Savagely slaughtered?"

The American looked at him fixedly. Then he said, "Show me that man Toboggen—the Toboggen—alive, and I shall——"

Bebitz smiled. "Swallow your hit—is that your idiomatic American expression?"

Watkins said, "Swallow my words. Some of them, anyway. Some I said about you folks in my time, over in the United States. Fancy Toboggen being alive! No one ever heard about him, these last—how many years? Ten? Fifteen?"

Bebitz said lightly, "He did not work in politics. He is a medical expert. He dealt with health problems, up here in this part of the world. Isn't that so, Comrad. Ursula Toboggena?"

"Yes," she said quietly.

Watkins said, "I want to see him. I want to talk to him."

"Oh," said Bebitz, looking at him, and at the girl, and at him again, and smiling. "You want to talk—to the father of this young citizen? Traditions have changed, in our country."

Ursula—ah, it was only a sound: outrage, inarticulate.

Watkins burst out laughing. "That's her answer for you. There you are."

"What else, then—if one may ask?"

Watkins looked at him steadily. "As you say he is familiar with this district—I want to ask him a thing or two. About gold."

"You interested?" It was asked with raised brows, with the lightest touch.

Watkins said stubbornly, "You can probably have that loan on your gold mines—if I am accompanied over by a suitable interpreter."

"Oh," said Bebitz. "So I was right, after all? Congratulations."

"Bebitz!" Ah, she had found her voice again.

Walter M. Watkins looked at her, and looked at him, and looked at her again. "Well," he said in the end, evenly. "Getting chilly. I'd better be going." Turning to Bebitz, he said coldly, "In case you have any requests—or applications—to make, I shall be in my room. I am going on to Vladivostok tomorrow morning. I want to catch my plane there, and go home."

CHAPTER XXI

PALE and determined, Father Calv went upstairs alone, to knock at the door of the enemy and to challenge him. In the assembly hall close by, they were still dancing. The brassy music walked along with him as he climbed the stairs.

He did not find the adversary sleeping. Upon his knocking, Maier, the Protestant parson, came out, with a napkin in front of him, red-faced, and said in a booming voice, "Oh, what a surprise. A pleasure. My wife and I are just—come in, Herr Pfarrer. You must have a bite with us."

Father Calv stood there, in the corridor of this luxurious hotel, erect and alien, clean-shaven and hollow-cheeked, a lean man with too thin a black coat over the cassock which he would not be deterred from wearing underneath by any persecuting, anti-Christian authorities—authorities that took bribe from his flock to turn a blind eye on Christian activity!—and he said quietly, "Thank you, Herr Pastor, I have not come to—"

"But you ought to," the jovial man interrupted him, and turning to his plump little wife in the open doorway (the laid half of a hotel room table was visible behind her), he said, "Adele, oughtn't he?"

The little woman said, "He ought to, Pastor." And to the visitor, "We have carp, stuffed the Polish way. Polish carp."

Father Calv did not look at her. His breath was fast. "Herr Pastor," he said, "I have not come to eat Polish carp with you, I have——"

"It was a bargain," the Frau Pastor interrupted him, offended. "Wasn't it, Pastor? One of our parishioners rears them in an artificial pond. The Herr Party Secretary eats them too. It certainly can't be called an indulgence."

The pastor said, "Go back, Adele. I say, go back. Keep my plate warm." Having closed the door on her, he turned, with a face redder by some degrees, and said, "Now, having refused to sit down at my table—or is it to sit down altogether?—what can I do for you, Herr Pfarrer?"

Calv said, "I have come to enquire, on my own behalf and on behalf of my flock, who are force-settled here—while you are force-settled forty miles away—I say, to enquire: does your visit to this settling-place of our community mean that you intend to take advantage of the presence of that American to——"

"My visit," the substantial man interrupted him, getting a little redder, "means nothing that could worry you, Herr Pfarrer. There are many Protestants settled here, too. There is no connection with any American. I know there is one here, and that is all."

Calv looked at him burningly, "You knew he was here—and you sit in there eating Polish carp?"

"There is nothing in Polish carp," the pastor said, irritated. "Anyway——" He became aware that he still had his napkin stuck in front of him, and took it off. "Anyway," he started once more, more red-faced still, "what's all the fuss about? According to my reliable information, this American visit has been arranged by the highest authorities. It is all aboveboard. Our relations with the local comrades are the best. So are theirs with us, I am happy to say. Reciprocally. It is a matter of give and take which——" He reddened a little more deeply and protested, "I don't want this turn of phrase to be misunderstood! What exactly do you suggest, or expect me to do about it all, anyway? What are you driving at?" He turned to the door, behind which there had been a discreet, moaning call. "Yes, Adele, I'll be with you in a minute." And to the Catholic, speaking more quickly, "Well? According to you, what can we do?"

The man, standing there erect, had to fight the fast-breath of his emotion before he could reply, "Your congregation over there where you live is sixty-four, Herr Pastor, while mine is only thirty, but——"

"Twenty-eight," said the substantial one quickly.

The other man looked at him burningly. "Thirty. It is at the moment irrelevant. We must take advantage of the presence of this foreign observer to—— My flock stands outside. I invite you to step with me in front of my flock, as yours is scarcely represented in this town, and in solemn deputation——"

The pastor said, "My dear fellow——"

"Reverend, if you please," said Father Calv.

The pastor said angrily, "Never mind that. I am no Communist—you'll probably believe me. But—excellent relations, as I remarked before. They are completely liberal to us, in this district, I am thankful to say. Also, after all, they are the authorities. Our Lord said, Give unto God what is God's and unto Caesar——"

"Caesar!" The man erect laughed cuttingly. "I ought to have known. So you won't co-operate?"

The substantial one approached him closely. "No," he said hotly. "I won't No I won't"

A soft, reproachfully meaning call was behind the door of the dining-room. Towards that door, the Catholic raised an ascetic, dramatically indicating hand, and sud in a voice hemmed in by his outraged breath, "Reverend—your cup"

He turned to leave. He stopped. Someone outside in the street said, "Fire"

Their wrath forgotten, they both hurried downstairs. The brass hurried with their steps over from the assembly hall.

Stalin Boulevard lay deserted but for a scant dozen people who had drawn back into the entrance of the hotel. The reflection of the flames lay on their faces.

Out there, standing all by itself, the maypole was burning, sending one wild flame high up into the darkness, like a huge torch.

No word was spoken. There was no sound, but for the crackling of this narrow and lonely conflagration.

They were still dancing, back in the assembly hall.

CHAPTER XXII

"NEXT," said Tretjak.

They had cleared the assembly room in the Cultinst. A few candles were burning, but could not light up more than the platform with a table and a few chairs. The well of the hall was plunged in darkness. If you had owl's eyes, you might just make out a paler speck or reflex up on the balcony—paper, a large portrait, it was in tatters.

Tretjak said, "Next"

"Next," Citizeness Varbarova, Assistant Elementary Teacher, repeated. She sat up on the table, at the narrow end to the left, with paper and pencil.

"The cable is cut," said the one-eyed sub-lieutenant. "The first search party of twenty I sent out to find the spot did not return. I led a second patrol myself, we got up the river two miles this side of the Camp. That is how far we got. The bridge is down."

"Blown?"

"Not yet known," said One-eye. "The Local Commandant says he kept it mired, just in case. He has it sent out under guard, to make sure if it really was an explosion. Not yet returned."

"Your guards have a knack of disappearing, Comrade," Bebitz said to Tretjak.

Varbarova, with panicky hen's eyes, asked, "Do I write this down?"

Tretjak said, "Next."

Yakut said, "Regarding the transmitter. None."

A woman's voice, out of the dark well of the hall, corrected him. "We have a field transmitter, but no batteries. The telegraphist technical expert doctoring it, is a special activist effort, exceeding his work norm by fifty per cent by means of initiative."

There was silence.

Bebitz asked, "How did he doctor it?"

The voice said, "Plugged it into the main."

"Which is cut," said Bebitz. He turned to Yakut. "Wireless sets?"

Yakut stood there scowling. His jaw was set.

Another voice said, "The same. No batteries. They were stored in the cellar of the Ministry prison when no wireless was permitted in the war. When we took them out, it was found that counter-revolutionary elements must have interfered with them. Spoiled."

The first voice butted in again, "However, thanks to the Stakhinovic effort of the Comrade Telegraphic Technician——"

"Plugged into the man?" said Bebitz.

Some faces nodded in the semi-darkness. There was a pause.

Bebitz, stumbling with irritation, said, "Your administrative district, Comrade Ictyuk. Congratulations."

Ictyuk said "Next."

Atton said, "May I answer Comrade Bebitz, regarding the problems of administration of this district? In my capacity as Sub-District Commissioner."

"No," said Ictyuk.

Atton said, "I only want to put on record that I was up in my room, isle p."

"Next," said Ictyuk. "Next. Next."

Someone said "The telegraphist."

The telegraphist turned out to be Citizen Gorbakov, and identical with the manager of the Staphrodic store. He was a well-built man with an athletic build, of the tenor type, and he owned a booming voice. He was pale now, as fat as could be seen in candlelight. He had been dragged out of bed and brought over forcibly, as he appeared in the door a security soldier was visible behind him for a moment. He came in protesting. He said, "In my capacity as Secretary of the local Party cell——"

"New elections were to be held last week," said someone. "You postponed them."

The man said, "I am ill."

Some voice added, "Owing to gobbling the food you are in charge of."

Gorbakov said, "In my double capacity——"

Another voice said, "He has no double capacity. He is the telegraphist. The Staphrodic store manager is really his——"

"Is really," another voice interrupted, "the citizeness who a

minute ago spoke so eloquently about his achievements as a telegraphic technician. She is his wife."

"Comrades," said the man, "I am ill."

A voice said, "He's taken to his bed to shun responsibility. In his twofold capacity."

"Threefold capacity."

The man looked this way and that as the voices leapt up. The chase was on.

Tretjak said, "Step up here. Up here I said. What is your statement?"

Yes, as the man stood there with the candles in front of him, trying to pierce the all but darkness in the room beyond, it could be seen that he was very pale. He said, "Comrades, you know me."

"We do," said someone.

"To your sorrow"

The man winced. "Comrades," he said, "you know that even in bed I don't neglect my duty."

There was some laughter.

The man screamed, "I protest against this anti-Socialist frivolity. Those who have come to my modest living quarters know that even in bed I have my telegraphic machinery next to me. At night, I telegraph in bed"

Laughter again.

The man made ready to scream again, but stopped.

Bebitz looked at him in disgust. Tretjak said, "Continue."

"There is not much to be continued," the man said, hoarse all of a sudden. "The Camp is in revolt. The prisoners will march on Poshansk tomorrow morning, as sure as hell. And we are cut off."

There was silence. At last, Bebitz asked flatly, "How do you know?"

The man waved his arms. "Step outside, look for yourselves. The maypole was burning outside, just twenty-five minutes ago. Ten minutes later, there were another two trees burning on the hill-crests out West. Another ten minutes later--look outside. Four, five, seven. North, East, West, South. The one here outside in the street was the signal. That's what started it. That, and the news that the Americans are coming."

Someone said, "A lie."

The man screamed, "Lie or no lie, that is what started it."

Bebitz said aggressively, "Is that what you got on the telegraph before it was cut?"

A voice out of the twilight said, "Where is the man who was brought back from the forest last night, by special plane?"

Gorbakov yelled, "That's it: where is he? He's gone over to them, probably, Antoni Maximovich Toboggen!"

There was silence. Into it, a clear voice out of the room's darkness asked, "Who brought Toboggen back?"

There was no answer.

Tretjak said, "Adjourned." As they were filing out in silence, he added, "Committee." Three, four turned back. The others left. The doors closed. Tretjak, leaning back in his chair, said, "Citizen Bebitz will first of all wish to tell us something about his family background."

Bebitz said, "Citizen Bebitz won't do anything of the sort. I am responsible to Moscow."

Tretjak said, "This is Poshansk."

"Citizen," said Bebitz, "if you want to bar my way by means of petty technicalities, please yourself. But I should not wish to be in your skin once the reaction of your Secretariat in Moscow is handed down to you, Citizen."

"Moscow is far," Tretjak said, colourless.

"For your safety," said Bebitz, "it can't be far enough. What about the cut cable, which was laid through the Camp owing to your careless supervision?"

Tretjak said flatly, "The citizen will be given plenty of time to embody all that in a full statement, which we shall pass on."

Bebitz, trembling with rage, said quietly, "Citizen. Whatever your local powers may be, Citizen. If you raise one finger to frustrate my present efforts to save what can be saved from this situation for which you are responsible, you will stand your trial as a counter-revolutionary wrecker. Your alleged *agent provocateur's* achievement of playing that signalling system of the burning trees into the hands of the prisoners will then gain a different aspect.

The aspect of complicity. You won't even get a trial, you will be dealt with administratively, unless you stop your antics now—now, Citizen, right now."

There was silence. Then Tretjak said, colourless, "I accept your statement under protest, and with reservations."

Bebitz said, "I want an apology."

"Under protest," said Tretjak.

Bebitz, raging, said very quietly, "I want an apology."

"I apologize," said Tretjak.

"And I apologize to your office, Comrade," Bebitz said coldly. "Let us get down to business." He stroked his brow, to banish a headache, to concentrate. "Now then," he said, and it could be noticed all of a sudden that he was very tired. "Now then. Let us assume the statement of that comrade—what was his name—the telegraphist?—let us assume his statement is correct. Probably it is not, in many details. That does not matter. Let us take it as a working basis. Agreed? Right. I said, the correctness in detail does not matter. It does matter to us, to some of us those details may be a matter of life and death. But we are not private individualists, even in dying, are we? If we die, there will be others. In an extreme situation like this one—tomorrow morning it may be beyond our control!—in such a situation we must ignore our individual likes and interests. Some of us have come here to this remote place on a special errand, connected with—" He interrupted himself, and asked, "Where is he, incidentally?"

Someone said, "Asleep in his room."

Bebitz nodded. "We have come on an errand connected with a certain American. The very fact of our coming here has caused rumours, and we shall have to face their consequences. But what will it all look like in the eyes of that American? His individual fate is uninteresting to me. I repeat, his individual fate is uninteresting to me. Only, certain—negotiations—in a tentative way—are afoot between us and him. What we want from him will be of great relevance to the well-being of this country. Of very great relevance. If we are to get from him what we want, he must not witness what might happen here tomorrow morning! Once they notice farther down South that the cable is cut, they will send some troops, to restore order in the Camp. Easy, too. But Walter M. Watkins must

not know that there are camps. When things begin to happen, he must no longer be here. He must go."

There was a short silence. A voice asked, "What do you mean by 'he must go'?"

"Train?" said someone.

A voice said, "The bridge is down."

A voice said, "The comrade knows that. If he says he must go, he must have an idea how."

"How?" said somebody.

Bebitz did not reply.

Someone said, "The plane? The old little plane Toboggen came in?"

"Crazy," said somebody.

Someone said, "What state is it in, any way? Ask the pilot."

"The pilot," Trotjak said, "has been brought over for questioning. He is outside."

Someone said, "Call him in."

At a sign from Trotjak, the door was opened. A man staggered in, bandaged. He seemed to have one wish, one burning desire: to lie down on the floor. He was propped up at one side by a young, red-cheeked nurse, who was as dumb and as healthily animal as a young cow. At the other side, Head Nurse Probinkova was leading the human wreck. She was small, cold, sexless, and as primly alert, with her red-rimmed eyes, as an ageing bird.

"What happened to the citizen?" someone asked her.

She said, "He stumbled. A small self-inflicted mishap. Nothing, really. He is quite all right."

Someone said, "Can he fly?"

"Of course he can," she said dully, propping him up. "Can't you?" She shook him a little. "Can't you?" she repeated sharply close to his ear. The man sagged. She caught him up, at the last moment. "Shamming a bit," she said.

Bebitz said, "How dare you say that this man can fly an aeroplane? Is that your attitude to a dying patient—and to State property?"

She looked up to him, quick-moving, with lidless eyes.

Bebitz said, "Can he fly?"

"Impossible," she said at once. "Can you?" She shook him. "There."

Bebitz said, "You can take him back."

They led out the walking corpse between them. The door closed.

Someone said, "That settles it."

"We must have another pilot," Bebitz said lightly.

There was no answer.

A voice asked, "Who knows if the American will want to go, anyway?"

Bebitz shrugged his shoulders. "He is thinking up conditions. He will be made to drop his conditions—in an emergency."

Someone said, "There remains the question of the pilot."

"What sort of an aircraft is it?" Bebitz asked.

"Kolchos Trainer," said somebody.

The door opened. It was Urula Toboggena. "Oh," she said. "Sorry, Comrades. Is this a Committee, am I intruding? I was looking for——" She looked about.

"You're wearing a pilot's badge?" a voice said, out of the twilight.

"Yes," she said gaily.

"This is a Committee," Bebitz said. "Will you please leave us now."

The voice insisted, "Ever flown a Kolchos Trainer?"

"Why yes," she said, laughing. "For three years. A ramshackle little thing. That's all we had, down in Outer Mongolia." She laughed again. "Why?"

There was no answer.

Bebitz said, "No." Louder, almost shrilly, he repeated, "No!" He turned to her, and said, very quietly, "Can't you see that you are intruding, Comrade?"

She left, wordless.

CHAPTER XXIII

"HULLO, Citizen," he said.

She stopped. "Ah, that's you, Citizen?"

He said, "I have been leaning here in the dark, here at the corner of the house. Waiting for you."

She said, "You're lying again, aren't you? You couldn't know I'd pass here."

He said, "Once a man has my experience in leaning at a corner—" He finished his sentence with a gesture; it was lost to the darkness.

"Lying and boasting," she said. "All the same, I'm sorry my father kicked you out of my room, Citizen."

"Kicked me out," he said lightly. "What do you know about being kicked out? There are fourteen different varieties."

"Silly," she said. "I just don't know why I keep listening to you." She burst out laughing. "Fourteen different varieties of——!" She stopped again. Her heart was a little heavy, she could not have said why. She asked, "Are there any reasons, Citizen, why you allege you waited for me at this corner?"

"Allege," he said lightly. "Allege. You won't beat me with allege. I know all the long words. I made a list once. Two hundred and twenty-three long words, all found by myself, among them seventeen—seventeen!—with six what-you-call-its."

"Syllables?"

"Syllables, y'es. I made the list out because there was such a long wait. Nazi Extermination Camp. Then the wait was so long, I skipped it and escaped to the Soviet Union. And you—allege! You won't beat me with a three-syllabler." He paused, and asked very lightly, "What is allege?"

She laughed. "There. Been lying again." She looked at him more closely, and asked, "What's this?"

He let it dangle from his hand, in the near-darkness, nonchalantly. He said, "Just to show you. A present for you. And you—allege."

"Present?" she said. "Oh." Her heart was tight. Her heart was heavy.

"A compass," he said very lightly.

"Not really?" she said. "A real one? A toy one, probably. A real——? Oh. Does it work?"

He said, "It works."

"Oh," she said, as he gave it to her "Oh, with a chain!"

He said, "I never gave compasses without chains. So a citizen can put it round her neck."

"Oh," she said quietly.

He said nonchalantly, "That's what in Monopolo-Capitalism is called an omekette."

She was much impressed. Ah, the Citizen Honoured Technician Ursula Toboggan was much impressed. Ah, she was moved, all of a sudden. "Ah," she said, "Citizen, this is very—this is really very, very—— And the chain."

"Yes," he said. "If you clasp it a little it is like gold."

"Yes," she said, very quietly.

He said, "An omekette protects you, in Monopoly-Capitalism."

"Against what?"

"Oh," he said. "Against everything. Against getting gassed. Or against the Nazis hanging you (other while you stand there and can do nothing about it). Or if you are a lady, against the Poles liberating a lady, or the Nazis liberating a lady, or the Hungarians liberating—— If you are a lady then it is many liberations, see? Or in a camp, the fact that you are a lady is not to get under the tram. That's what an omekette is for, in Monopoly."

"Cap?" she said.

He said, "Too long. Word is too long. You can't pronounce the whole each time. An omekette you are under its protection, that's all."

"That's very kind of you," Ursula said, letting the compass dangle from its chain, ah, she was a little sad and a little gay and could not have told why either. "Very, very kind—but I am under my own protection, Citizen."

He said, "Now don't be childish. With the prisoners rioting. Ever seen prisoners who haven't seen a lady for a few years, and then all of a sudden——? You haven't. What about the American,

by the way? It's said he's to be flown out." He had stepped behind her, hanging the compass round her neck. "Chain wants a fastener, really," he said lightly.

"The American flown out?" she said. "By whom? Is there an aircraft?"

"By whom? I don't know by whom," he said, busy with the chain. "Without a fastener one can only tie it, somehow. An aircraft? There is a little trainer aircraft. Don't you know? They oughtn't to have left it unguarded, down on the pond. A Kolchos Trainer. Don't move now. What's the matter? I can't fix it, Citizen, if you move."

She stood there. She had started. But now she did not move.

Busy with the chain, he said, "This chain will be like gold once you clean it, really. Better than gold. In that aircraft, it was the accelerator chain. Or carburettor? Some chain. Is that too tight now? Why don't you say something?"

"It's all right," she said very quietly. She stood there, still turned away from him, motionless.

He said, "They ought to have put a guard to that aircraft, really. One man took a bottle from it—outside it said 'Anti-Freeze'. Can you drink that? Alcoholic. There was a citizeness took the visor. They have no culture. At least I put a piece of string where I took the chain. Otherwise it makes an aeroplane kind of unsafe—that is my philosophy." He had fixed it. "You can turn now, Citizen," he said. "How's that for an omelette?"

"Beautiful," she said quietly. She did not turn. Her eyes were alarmed, but she did not turn. Absentminded, she muttered, "Beautiful."

They both started. Bebitz had called out to her, from the door. "Been looking for you," he called out. "Party Committee. You are wanted."

"Yes," she said.

The boy said, "Good luck."

"Yes," said the Honoured Technician Ursula Toboggana. She turned. Her lips were trembling, just a little.

"Bebitz——" she said.

He lifted his hand, trying to banish a headache from his brow.

"Yes, what is it? They are waiting for us inside."

"Bebitz," she said, "you don't ask me—you don't, do you?"

"What?"

"To—co-operate—Bebitz!"

Bebitz said, with an ash-grey face: "You are mad. Who is asking you to do what? Am I selling you to the American? Is it your notion of Communist morality that we use women?" He cried out, "Are you completely mad?" He loosened his collar. "Come," he said in a voice that failed him. "They are waiting for us inside."

She did not move.

He said, violently, "We aren't in the wild woods. We aren't in the romances, Ursula." Lightly, he added "All you will be asked is to fly him out."

She said, "I shall not go with him."

He said, "Only to Magadan. Two hundred miles. If absolutely necessary, re-fuel and go on to Vladivostok. Along the coast. Child's play, for you, in no night."

She said very quietly, "I shall not go with him."

"Ursula!" he said, flung. He checked himself. "You are overstrung." He looked at his watch, without seeing it, meaningless, with an ill man's face. He muttered, "You are overstrung."

CHAPTER XXIV

URSULA, said Bebitz, is that you, Ursula, standing here in the dark again? Again I have been looking for you everywhere. It is getting very cold; the cold is heavy on my chest. Won't you come inside? All right, let us stay out here, Ursula. You are upset. I looked at you all the time, inside at the Committee meeting. Upset, all this night, I thought; having met her father after so many years. Thrown off her balance, for once. But then I thought—no. She has gone through many trials; she has come out of them—bright, and clean, and unharmed. It could not really be that private aspect, meeting an old man estranged from you, yes, a stranger by now to you and myself and our whole world—no, I thought, it couldn't be that.

Therefore, the private aspect being excluded—what can it be? Look. I have given myself twenty minutes off, precious minutes, in this situation; but I am not puncking; I am completely cool. And I have a right to these twenty minutes, I have not had a break since seven this morning. I wanted to devote this whole break to you. Completely. Five minutes are gone looking for you, but there are a full fifteen left. I so much want to help you. I am glad my deductions show it is not the meeting with your father that is your real worry; I am not much of a help in such private matters. Now, look. There is no reason for you to be distressed about the deal we are trying to pull off so desperately with this American. I quite see. You have grown up in our Soviet Union. You are used to seeing us on top, always. The nobler, the stronger, the better, always. The triumph of our dialectics over other people's muddled thinking. Our starting from the logical premise and therefore reaching the logical conclusion. But, Ursula, there can be temporary setbacks. Why not? There were setbacks during the war, as you know so well. You weren't down-hearted then, were you?

Also, is this a setback, really? I watched you while I explained inside that a transaction which pawns our little rag on the map here—no, not even this rag but a few gold mines dotted on this rag—against all those marvellous advantages coming from a loan for the whole Soviet Union—it will be a great diplomatic victory over

Monopolo-Capitalism, really Economic long-range strategy. You agreed. Your political education told you that I was right. So I can logically eliminate that point too as a possible reason for your depression. That is logical. I can only work with my logic, Ursula.

Therefore, what remains? Our being entangled locally—in our present little predicament? The revolt, out there, in the Camp? That there are a few camps in this district, and a few men who might take the first opportunity —? But that is exactly why they are prisoners! I hope your reaction, or depression, is not really coloured after all by the fact that your father seems to be playing a mysterious part in this small mutiny? It won't reflect on you, I can assure you of that, it doesn't concern you in the least. Much though it will concern me, and reflect on me, of course. That citizen in there was right, and I was wrong shouting him down or out manœuvring him dialectically. I shouted down my own conscience. He was right in saying that I ought to have known better than bring Alexei Maximovich Toboggen back from the dead, even for a day. I gambled high, and lost. A Communist must not gamble. Above all he must not lose. I shall have to answer for that. But that is my business, not yours. For you there remains only—it is political immaturity, Ursula, to allow oneself to be depressed by such a local and momentary embourgeoisment.

So that is it, isn't it? Having been on top an hour or two ago, and now all of a sudden being—oh no! not on the run. We are being on the defensive, at this single small spot in our great country, for a few hours. And even if we were to be on the defensive in this whole part of the world for some time, in consequence of the deal we hope to conclude with the Americans? We may be expected to calumny and riots up here for days and months. And veins, maybe—and why not? Is being on the defensive humiliating, is it such a bad thing? It is a noble thing, Ursula. So why be downhearted? Being thrown back on the defensive—a great chastisement. A great occasion for self-criticism. You have grown lazy in the flesh—you grow slim again. Muscular. Taut. Wakeful. Young! Ah, you shall see how young we shall be, how ruthless, how noble, how very much in the right. We shall never again have to read in the eyes of—some people in this country who never dare speak up—that we are

oppressors. Maybe (ye shall be the oppressed! So why be downhearted at our expectation and hope of chastisement?

But if it can't be that consideration either—what ~~is~~ there remaining for you to be downhearted about? After the dialectical elimination of all I have considered—sounds absurd to you, probably, dialectical elimination. But there it is, ~~I~~ want to comfort you; I am investing the whole of this break on trying—and am probably not much of a comfort all the same. Don't hold it against me. Even if I work it with my brains—but it comes from the emotional innermost of my heart. Of my heart, yes. Of my heart.

Therefore, logically, if the situation in general cannot cause your despair, it must be some particular single aspect of it— Oh, particular aspect, I said. So that's it. I am on the right track at last, am I not? It is not the situation so much that dismays you, but— Mr. Walter M. Watkins. The fact that we decided that he must be removed from the—theatre of operations, and the way you got to think yourself connected with that decision. Of course, that is it. I ought to have known, of course. I tried to ignore your reaction when the matter came up. Nerves, I thought. A moment of irritation. I refused to take it seriously. But I ought to have known better. I fully realize that I am being absurd, from the emotional point of view. Any young romantic whipper-snapper would have known at once, I suppose? While I have to use the cumbersome road of dialectical elimination— Radiculous, am I not? Am I not? Why don't you say that I am?

But you must admit, cumbersome or not, that I reached the correct conclusion. Now look here, Ursula. He must be gone by the time things begin to happen here. He would see too much; he has seen or sensed a great deal by now, I suspect. Enough at any rate to try and blackmail. As he senses that we are anxious to make him go, he insists on your going with him. The impudence of it. My fingers itch to show him— But we mustn't. We mustn't. We must control the itch. He wants you to go with him—how does he put it? As an interpreter of our wishes, all the way to America. The brazen impudence of it, and the romantic ignorance of our ways. Sending a young girl abroad, as our goodwill ambassador, in company of that gentleman. I have a suspicion that this man Smith is behind it; not his secretary, as he pretends, but according

to our information an advertising expert; a sinister aspect which we cannot fathom. This is no advertising matter. We don't want to launch our good, sober, logical women's fashions in the United States—we want a loan, to build, and live. All we concede, and we are adamant in that, is that you fly him out to Magadan or Vladivostok. And maybe we should not even concede that, but for our wish to make him go, and the fact that we can only get him out by air and that you are the only pilot available. A coincidence. I don't deny that it is not unwelcome. And he will accept the compromise and be content with stopping at Vladivostok, if you stop at Vladivostok. That is what is wanted—remove him from this theatre—far enough to be out of gunshot, as it were—but still keep him in the country, for further negotiation.

And why can we be sure that he will accept this compromise, as long as it is you who fly him out from here? Because his attitude to you is not coldly reasoning but emotional. He who is the slave of his emotions is the loser. How could we afford not to take advantage of his infatuation? Also why not? Are you seeing ghosts? He proposes to marry you, and there are some suggesting that you should make the slightest actual concession in that direction? You are utterly unjust to our traditions, no one thought of that but yourself. We are moralists. If there is one thing we hold on to, in triumph and in distress, if there is one thing that makes us strong, it is that we are moralists. No one ever suggested that you should do more than take advantage of his emotionally unsettled state to convince him that he will best serve his own interests, his material interests, and those of his country, if he works for our aims. That is all. If I let you to go with him, I myself, if I tell you that you can go in safety—

But no. Oh no, I must not deceive you. You are seeing ghosts; but who would not be seeing ghosts? There is no danger. But at the same time—emotions, I said, and he the loser who is emotional; and yet, at the same time there is an enormous, desperate revolt in my emotional innermost self against letting you go. For against all reason, I am jealous, Ursula. Here in my innermost self I am dominated by the degrading passion of jealousy, it tears my heart to pieces; I am jealous. And I owe it to you that I must humiliate myself in this act of self-criticism and confess my folly. That

tragedy in my past—it is still the memory of that tragedy, the emotional weakness derived from it, that I must overcome. I must not shirk, I must not shirk!

Let me be merciless against myself. It could be argued—you said it yourself: he is after you. It could be argued that he will try and take the opportunity even of your going with him to Vladivostok—to get you. Yes, to get you—it could be argued. To get you under his spell, irrevocably, in the day or two while you will be alone with him there, waiting for us to follow. You have never been alone with him. You don't know them. A corrupter. A foreigner. Money does not tempt him; he has enough of it. Of power, he has enough. Moral principles, ideals, one should think; a being endowed with the gift of thinking logically must be accessible to the greatness of our ideals, and—here, brother being, without any recompense and debasing deals, here, you need my assistance in securing for you a loan, I shall do what you want. He won't. He won't. He won't. So there is only the chance of your exposing yourself to the dangers arising from his emotional weakness. It might be argued that a man like him can have all the women in his world, at a price. At a very much lower price. But then again, it might be argued that this is just the point! The dialectics of such a man are such: the very fact that you refused him, that you are so far out of his reach, would make him covet you only more violently and greedily. And he a man past his prime. And you are very lovely, Ursula. And if I were given to deceit, I could still deceive you and deceive myself and say, no fear, it cannot happen, you'll get him to work for us—and not pay the price.

Which price? Ah, am I a fool? Am I trembling for your bodily chastity and your power to defend yourself? I am trembling for the chastity of your mind. Not for your power am I trembling, but for your determination. You don't know it yourself, Ursula, and your mouth is uttering brave words against him, and against his world, brave and great words—but you are greatly lured. That world of his—a great temptation! He will make the best of his opportunity. He will expose you to that temptation mercilessly. He will lure you on. And I tell you that at this very moment you are already wavering. It would be—almost—too high a price. Do not pay that price!

You won't. Ah, you won't. I know that you never will. All

I admit is that I should feel even more thoroughly reassured if you were a woman of great experience. Smile—and make him do what we want—and yet stay faithful to our world and not keep the unspoken promise to follow him. But then again, he would not listen to a woman of great experience. Now it could be argued that there might be a danger the other way round, with an inexperienced young woman like yourself. Won't he promise and not keep the promise? But the answer to that is, No. Not he. The very depravity and frivolity of his super-bourgeois upbringing stands against it. Either a cad would not keep his promise, or—why, a real man fortified in some great belief might not keep a promise like that. I myself might not keep a frivolous and immoral promise like that, in a clash of ideologies, for the sake of a greater end. But not he. He, Uisula, is a gentleman. We can rely on him completely. And these are his dilemmas. And I am warning myself to pieces, explaining to you his dilemmas and telling you to be of good cheer and to go with him. And I am warning myself too to be of good cheer. And I know that you will go with him and return, and tell me that you did not succumb. And I shall never believe that you did not succumb. And I am like a man whistling in the dark.

Not enough, not good enough? All right, then. I am too deeply involved to act correctly. There is something in my innermost logical being that says Beware. Don't go too far. She is the one to get him for us, there is no one else. And you are seeing ghosts, man, if you doubt that she will be safe. If you were to try first and call on him and argue him out of his blindness, it would lead nowhere. By your abortive intervention you would spoil the change. So stand back, Bebitz, and let her go. But, all right. Against my conviction, with seeing eyes, in an abnormal lack of Communist discipline, I shall take on myself the terrible danger of wrecking everything. I shall first go and plead with him. Can I do more? But then again, can I do less? Will you not be my wife?

Let me say something about that as well. Just now. Now. When I asked you, when we agreed to be married, the prospects of our married companionship were—work, of course, but work with flags. Parades, inspections, the wielding of authority, the participation in congresses. The prospects I can offer you now—in contrast to the prospects he can offer you if you accept him altogether;

for that too is an eventuality I must not exclude: that you win him for our side and yet are lost to myself forever. But let that pass, let me preserve the desperate hope that in spite of it all you will return to me: what will you return to? I might be held responsible, having acted brazenly and arrogantly. I might be reduced to a modest assignment. I am a good worker. They will not discard me altogether. They trust me. In a small way, they will still send me abroad. It happened before, Ursula. If that happens what are the prospects I can offer you? You don't know what it is like—life abroad, as a Communist. Privacy reduced to a single back room and perhaps to a single bed. We shall dispose of funds, but for ourselves we shall not use more than we need to cover our barest necessity. The policeman at the corner will be our enemy, the man sitting next to us in the train will be an informer, somebody will go through our wastepaper basket while we are out. The landlady will give us notice, and the next landlady will give us notice, and the next. We shall call a meeting in a room for two hundred people, and eight will come. Our work will be—for there will be work all the time!—our work will be: talking in an undertone, and showing a face of confidence. Our work will be: waiting. Waiting for the messenger from over there, who will stay for the night with us on his errand which we shall not know. Waiting for the newspaper from over there. Waiting for the directive from over there in answer to our enquiry sent seven months before. Waiting for the statistics—and look, Ursula, look, there is another increase of four point three per cent for the last quarter 'in the overall output of Soviet Industry; we'll celebrate it by having for dinner a kippered herring each; this is a red-letter day.

Ursula, it is for the sake of that four point three per cent that you will go with Wutkins. Do you now understand? Yes, yes, I shall go first and try to make him sign—look: this here. Just a few lines; but if he signs them he will stick to them. And if he does not sign—ah, but he must, I shall be insistent, and brilliant, and eloquent. And if I fail all the same—ah, but I must not fail. But if I fail—I shall just give you this paper, Ursula. And you will—travel. And—try.

For the sake of the four point three per cent!

CHAPTER XXV

"Oh," said Watkins.

Bebitz said, "Am I disturbing you? I've come to apologize. There was some acrimony in our last conversation. I am sorry. It was my fault."

"My dear fellow," said Watkins. "It was my intention to seek you out and do exactly the same thing. I am sorry. I loathe dramatics. I'd made up my mind to talk to you, man to man. Cards on the table. It's our American way. The most difficult way to talk to you folks."

"I should have to reciprocate with your own words," Bebitz said, smiling tiredly. "Cards on the table—the Soviet way."

Watkins nodded. "Once again."

"Once again what?"

"Oh, nothing of very great importance," Watkins said lightly. "Just one of my pet ideas lately. And not a very useful idea either, for a man leading a public life. It concerns the problem of bona fides."

Bebitz looked up quickly, suspiciously, "Ah?"

"There you are," said Watkins. "Suspicious. Alerted. On the look-out for the other fellow's trick. Well, that's just what I had in mind, mentioning the problem of bona fides. Did it ever occur to you that everybody is bona fide, in this world of ours? In all my life—which has by now been a great deal longer than yours, a very great deal, alas—meeting, ah, thousands of people, friend and foe—I don't think I ever met a man who wasn't bona fide. Did you ever meet a villain? Yes, you will say—quickly. You must, probably, as a professional Communist. But think again—try to think as a private being, if that's within your powers. Stop and think, man. That Arch-Nazi, wasn't he more bona fide, more terribly bona fide than any other man alive? His limping propagandist might be different, I thought for some time—until some of our guys found his diaries. Ever looked at them? No good either, bona fide again, unshakably convinced that what he stands for is Justice, Right,

light. I have a friend who is a great criminologist. I should be glad to have you meet him—if there were a possibility, which of course there isn't. He'd tell you that the lowest, vilest murderer—he had a mass murderer once, the horror amongst horrors; I shan't detail his crimes to you; he regarded himself as the Lord's chosen instrument to punish sinning mankind. Do you know how they caught him? He went back to one of his victims' flat to feed the canary. Bona fide! Every Nazi gas-chamber specialist, if you got him talking, would tell you of his holy mission. Bona fide again. Give me villains. I can deal with them. What is the undoing of this world is that every man is as bona fide as every other man. Not a useful thought to think, for a man in politics."

"Exactly," said Bebitz. "And a great luxury. One has to be very rich to afford to think your way. We are rich only potentially. Which is not yet. We are poor now. Is it compatible with your bona fides to cut us off, just now, after this war?"

"Lend-Lease, you mean?" Watkins said. "The loan again? Is that what you have in mind?"

"A poor man," said Bebitz, "can't afford to have in mind more than one thing at a time."

Watkins said, "That's all right with me. Only, the one thing I have in mind, my only topic, is Ursula Toboggena."

"Your topic," said Bebitz. "And what if it isn't mine?"

Watkins looked at him for a long time. "It is," he said at last quietly. "And now listen to me. I tried to explain it to Ursula herself—yes, I call her by her first name, in her absence, in my conversations with myself, and in a sense this is a conversation with myself, as you will notice. A very hard bargain, tough, merciless, with myself. I tried to explain myself to her, but you butted in. A good thing too, for that last little exchange between us—acrimonious, you called it—ah, it did not make me change my mind. Nor did it frighten me. I am not easily frightened. Only—how shall I call it? It rang a bell. It is probably foolish to tell you, and you won't live up to the situation, owing to your whole training and background and—bona fides. But I owe it—no, not to her. Not to you, of course. But to myself. Look, when you talked to me—acrimoniously—shamming as if you were talking about a highly political issue and in fact talking about a girl—a bell rang, I said. I

ought to have said: a mirror was held up to me. Look at yourself, it said inside me. Look. What do you see? An elderly gentleman, bulky and flabby, with white hair and heavy pouches under his eyes—secretly very tired—but trained for so long to be young that he just can't leave off. And there you are now, you, Walter M. Watkins, bandying about highly polished repartee with—why, this chap Bebitz could be your son! Driving a bargain over— Ah, again a term you won't understand: Dignity. You see, that's what we old-fashioned folks are liable to fall back on. The transaction as originally contemplated by me would run counter to the dignity of my white hair and, well, of my standing in my own world. No conditions. No transaction."

"No transaction?" said Bebitz.

"None," Watkins said. "I want to talk to you with empty hands. We both love her. No, don't interrupt me. You too love her; cut out the stuff. Loving her, we want the best for her. Let's check up on what we have to offer her. Right? Sounds crazy to you—an offer not explained to the beloved—or to her father, as you so kindly suggested an hour ago—but to the antagonist? Then let me be crazy, for once. Also, we are gamblers, in our world. I'm going to gamble on you—you are a thinking machine, if I size you up correctly. If I feed my facts into you—ah, you'll work them out all right, and act on them, that isn't dependent any longer on your free will. You haven't got any of that commodity, surely—having elected to be a robot?"

"Are you trying to enlist my sympathy," Bebitz asked quietly, "by means of offending me?"

Watkins said, "Are you going to betray your principles, trying to make me believe that you can be deflected by such private and sentimental considerations? No, let's stop fencing. Listen. My first plan, which I can afford to disclose to you bluntly, because it has no longer anything to do with my second plan, based on second thoughts—my first plan was this. You know of course—I know, you know; you know I know you know—that this journey of mine, after a defeat, was meant to give me a breathing space, before trying a come-back. Why, of course you know that. Your idea of making me work a loan for you—not at all unwelcome, in that pattern. It would fit in well. You guessed that. That is one up for

you. Goodwill and all that. Excellent. Walter M. Watkins coming home from wild Siberia and bringing goodwill all round and peace for our generation!—well, don't let us be rash, let's say for ten years—for five? All right, let us say for five!—with our only antagonist in our American Century. For it is our Century, young man; don't smile; don't make any mistake about that. Well, you know probably anyway, hence your plan. It fitted my private interests as well. You see, there is one thing you probably don't know. Somehow someone failed to feed the fact into your machine. I have gone out of gold. They squeezed me out, my own friends did. Your loan project, probably with some Kolyma gold security—am I right there, is that what you figured out?—would probably mean a come-back for me in that sphere of—private enterprise, if handled properly. I am good at handling such a thing properly. I was even thinking of leaving the government side out altogether and floating that loan—how much do you have in mind?—I can float that loan privately. The friends who did me in would co-operate. That is how things are done, in our decaying world doomed to dig its own grave, or what you call it. And—beg your pardon? Did you want to say something?”

Bebitz said, “Nothing, really. I am learning. Not easy, for a thinking machine. You set out, you overwhipped my objection, to speak not of State affairs and loans and all that, but of love—was not that your word? I sit here listening to what you people call a conversation on love.”

Watkins exclaimed, “But I am speaking of love all the time. This is romance! Because I haven't mentioned Ursula so far? Can't you see how excellently she would fit into the pattern? Can't you see the headlines? ‘Walter M. Watkins Returns to Fight, with Goodwill Deal and Beautiful Young Soviet Bride?’” He laughed, “Smith would like it.”

Bebitz looked into his laughter, stonily. “‘Bride?’” he said at last. “It used to be ‘interpreter.’”

Watkins, suddenly irritated, said drily, “You could leave that to me, in my world. Here, I may look a fool. In my world, it would be ‘bride.’”

Bebitz got up. “In short, you insist on her coming along with you,” he said quietly.

Watkins said, "What I explained to you so far was a first plan. I could afford to explain it, because it is obsolete."

"It is getting late," said Bebitz.

Watkins said, "There is plenty of time. Why are you folks so fidgety? I begin to suspect it is somehow connected with the fused lights and the bit of shooting—in a way I haven't found out yet. Plenty of time. My departure won't happen until I depart."

"Witty."

"I am not intent on being witty. I am intent on explaining to you that the first plan no longer stands. I have changed my mind. I need not have told you that either. I could have led you on and made promises, and in the end they just would not have materialized. You would scarcely have noticed, in the end, that it would have been owing to my not trying hard enough. I have perpetrated worse deceits than that one, in a long life. But—dignity, I said. It would be against dignity to do it on you. And to do it regarding my future wife."

"You are very sure of yourself," Bebitz said.

Watkins said, "Wrong again. I am desperately unsure of myself, at this moment. For my new plan offers you nothing in the bargain, for letting me go away with your young citizen. Nothing, nothing. My plan is to withdraw from public life. That has been a great temptation for some time; a temptation one must not own up to, in my America. There will be no need for me any longer to be young. Ah, the delight of it. I shall not smile, never again shall I smile and say that I am feeling fine. And I shall—ah, I shall call people by their second names, and I shall throw out the press. Do you know what a delight, what an unspeakable relish it will be to throw out the press? An odd way of planning for marriage, you will probably think; an odd way to woo a very young woman—and that by proxy, through the competitor. But to lead that sort of life, without the gold diggers muscling in—gold diggers: a term that will make you sit up—you must be married, in my civilization. Married to a non-American; an American would force you to be young again!"

Bebitz said, "Is that why you must have Ursula Toboggenna?"

Watkins looked at him for a long time. "I love her."

Bebitz shrugged his shoulders.

Watkins said, "We shall live idyllically, in complete retirement.

I am not a rich man, really. We shall spend, say, three hundred thousand dollars a year. Or two hundred thousand. A ranch in California, where it is farthest off the track. A little house in New York, so small you can't sit more than a dozen people for dinner at a time. A quiet place in Paris. Or at an isolated spot on the Riviera—miles from Cannes. Lock up all of them, sometimes, and just go about the oceans, in—I have a little yacht. Silence. Ah, isolation. Silence. Not for too long either. When they made me run for President, they checked up on me and said I was medically good for a presidential term. For one. Four years. Ah, but in privacy I'll live eight years, ten. Too long? Six years? Say six. In six years——!" He fell silent.

Bebitz said, "Have you finished?"

"I love her," said Watkins.

Bebitz said, "Your last word? You will do nothing for our loan?"

"I am fighting for my happiness," said Watkins. "I am fighting for her, here, with my empty hands. Offering you nothing."

Bebitz stood there in silence.

Watkins said, "I am a poor man. You have your life in front of you. Great ideals. Aims. I beg of you to let her go with me."

Bebitz said, "You still want to go, right now?"

Watkins said, "I am an old man. I want to go home."

CHAPTER XXVI

"I'm looking for Comrade Ursula Toboggena," Bebitz said. "Have you seen her?"

The three men stared at him.

"No," said Tretjak.

Attona said, "You are out of breath."

Yakut said nothing.

"Out of breath, yes," Bebitz said. "I must get her quickly. So long, Comrades."

"Don't hurry," said Tretjak.

Attona said, "You'll stay with us for a little while."

Yakut said, "We have analysed your case."

"Interesting," Bebitz said coldly. "Tell me sometime. Meanwhile——"

Tretjak said, "No."

Bebitz said, "I am in a hurry now. You might as well know. I've just talked to Watkins. The thing is off."

The three looked at each other. Then Tretjak said, "You will stay."

"Up to your tricks again?" Bebitz said. "I told you you can't play that on me." As they said nothing, he looked at them, at one after the other, and asked in an altered voice. "What's this, anyway? The Party? Ah, I see. Not the Party but the Ministry. Had a little conference with your staff, Tretjak, to back you up?"

Tretjak half turned away from him and said nothing.

Yakut looked at him with the eyes of a murderer, and said, "You will play, in the end."

Bebitz changed his tone, once more. "Right," he said quietly. "Ask. Go to hell, but it's your right to ask first, so ask." He sat down. He had grown a little pale, if you looked closely.

Attona had produced a paper and pen. "Name?" he said.

Bebitz flared up in anger for a moment, but controlled himself at once. Drily, he gave his name and rank.

"Party member?" Yakut asked.

Bebitz reached for his pocket-book, to produce his card.

Tretjak said, "Doesn't know his number by heart."

Bebitz, drily—~~he~~ would not be provoked again; and they would have to pay for this, said, "One-nine-eight-five-four-four." Under two hundred thousand, he thought at the same time; they'd better be careful.

Tretjak said, "Now proceed."

Attona said, "Proceed, report You said Watkins and——?"

"The thing is off," said Bebitz "He won't work a loan for us. Retires into private life. It's all off"

The three men looked at each other, saying nothing. Then Tretjak said, 'Having intrigued to arrange it, why are you now glad it fails?"

"Suspicious, isn't it, Tretjak?" Bebitz said conversationally.

Attona said, "The question put to you is, having intrigued to arrange it, why are you now glad it fails?"

Bebitz ignored him. His face had reddened again for a moment, but he controlled himself. He said, with the official idiom, "It was dialectically analysed to be the correct action to remove the Monopolo-Capitalist from this district because a malicious interpretation of purely inner-Soviet incidents here would upset his readiness to work for us, and therefore cancel his usefulness. Comrade Ursula Toboggenna was to fly him out, taking advantage of his readiness to be flown out by her. I have now explored his real intentions. He does not propose to work for us anyway, therefore his usefulness is nil, therefore he need not be flown out."

Yakut said, "Having intrigued to arrange it, why are you now glad it fails?"

Bebitz shrugged his shoulders. "Glad?" he said, irritated. "I am not glad. Cut out the stuff"

Attona said, "We're glad, Citizen, you put on record that the man's usefulness is lost. Therefore, on your own admission, he has passed out of the sphere of competence of Foreign Trade. And of Foreign Affairs generally. He is a security matter."

"Meaning what?" Bebitz asked

Tretjak said, "He must go"

Bebitz said, "Dialectically wrong. You Ministry fellows never see further than the tips of your noses. If he goes for the sake of a loan—
7 all right. If you were to have him flown out now, without any—

Capitalist incentive—he has seen a great deal already; what if he has seen too much?”

“Exactly,” said Tretjak.

Yakut said, “Having yourself intrigued to arrange it——”

Attona interrupted him. “You are stubbornly closing your eyes to our obvious interests. You are scheming to keep him here for private reasons of your own which will be gone into. You will be given an opportunity to defend yourself. Meanwhile, an analysis of the situation shows that, loan or no loan, he must not be here if and when something happens. Which can be the case in——”

Yakut interrupted brutally, “We are losing time.”

Bebitz said, “Just a minute, just a minute. I did not say he must—survive.”

“Exactly,” said Tretjak. “An accident.”

Bebitz looked from face to face. “I don’t—quite—understand,” he said at last quietly.

Tretjak bellowed at him, “Do you want to have to justify to the American Government if an accident happens here, on firm soil? Their ambassador coming to collect the body?”

Attona shouted, “Have you completely lost your sense of proletarian responsibility?”

Yakut sat there glowering, saying nothing.

Bebitz said quietly, “I don’t—quite—understand.” His face had grown pale again.

“He must be flown out, anyway,” Tretjak said, with a flat voice.

Bebitz, hoarsely, said, “You haven’t interfered with the plane, have you?”

Attona said to Tretjak, “He has no right to ask slanderous questions on what would be against Soviet principles.”

Bebitz, voiceless, said, “And—Comrade Uisula Toboggena?”

“The only pilot,” said Tretjak.

“And he wouldn’t have himself flown by any other,” said Attona.

“—kill her?” Bebitz said, almost inaudible.

Attona turned to Tretjak, “Has he a right to speak this way?”

Bebitz said, “Can you swear you haven’t interfered with the plane?”

Tretjak said, "He mistrusts Sp^oviet Man. It is beneath proletarian dignity to answer."

"There you are!" said Attona. "Will that do? Are you now satisfied at last?"

Bebitz got up. He swayed a little.

"Stop," said Yakut

Attona asked, "Where do you want to go?"

Bebitz said, "Tell her not to fly!"

"He won't," said Tretjak

Bebitz said, "She must not fly."

"Arrest him?" Attona asked Tretjak

Tretjak shook his head. "He won't tell her," he said flatly.

Bebitz shouted, "I shall tell her!"

Yakut stepped up to him. Murder was in his eyes.

Bebitz yelled, "I shall tell her, I shall tell her she must not fly!"

He pushed the murderer out of his way. He left, stumbling

CHAPTER XXVII

TOBOGGEN sat up with a jerk. When Ursula, carrying her candle, looked about in her dark bedroom, he was already sitting upright. Yes, he had hidden in his daughter's deserted room, in darkness. His hair was in disorder, his eyes were heavy and frightened. He was without coat or collar, his shirt gaped, revealing a wilderness of grey hair on his bony chest. That was how Ursula's candle discovered him: sitting there with crumpled trousers and hanging braces on her dishevelled bed.

"It's you," he said, with teeth still chattering, eyes still frightened, as she stepped up to him. Then he touched her lightly, with a self-conscious little laugh.

"I've been looking for you everywhere," said Ursula. "They thought— But I knew you wouldn't—escape."

"They're looking for me?" he said. His teeth were chattering.

She nodded. As he touched her again, she asked, "What's the matter, Father?"

"Nothing," he said. "Just touch you. Make sure it's you, really." There was his laugh again. "Because of the dreams. It's crazy what dreams you have, sometimes." He was still trembling. "Are they after me?" he asked, whispering. He looked at her. "You think I've been drinking again, don't you? But it's the pain. By chance, completely against my intention, I found here—" An empty bottle was standing on the floor, next to the iron bed. He kicked it away with his foot.

"They gave up looking for you," said Ursula. "But I didn't."

"The pain," he said. "It's my stomach."

"Yes," she said quietly.

He touched her again with his fingers, laughing self-consciously. "The dream," he said. "Bebitz. Really here? Of course he is. Just to check up. Of course he is. Was there a maypole burning?"

"But—" She looked up, startled.

"Now, now," he said, laughing lightly. "Don't get excited, child. As if I didn't know. It's just to check up." He started in front of him. He muttered, "So that is that."

"What's what?" she asked, puzzled.

He jerked himself free from his dizziness, and from his terror. "Don't worry about me, child," he said. He had now gained control over himself; he moved closer to her, he struggled for an expression of gaiety and eagerness, and failed, and asked hoarsely, "How did they take it? The signal, the news. What did they decide to do? Cooking something? Accusing each other? Accusing themselves? Confessions, recriminations, purges, conciliations? Shooting somersaults?"

She shook her head. "No," she said lightly. "They have made up their minds."

"Made up their minds about me?" he said quickly.

"About you?"

He looked at her, alarmed again. "And?" he said. "And? What do you mean, they haven't made up their minds about me? Anything wrong? They are cooking something, aren't they? Not about me, and no longer looking for me, because they think I'm out of their reach by now? Are they now—they aren't getting at you now, are they? Speak up, Ursula. They couldn't catch me, so they are cooking something against you? Is that it?"

She shook her head. "No," she said.

He was restless, like a beast in the forest sniffing the air. "Something is up," he whispered.

"Nothing is up," she said, looking in front of herself. "It's just the fuss they make about the American. Bebitz doesn't want—they all don't want—the American to be here when—troops move up tomorrow to quell the riot in camp."

Toboggen looked up, alerted. "Riot?"

She said, "The American must not know about camps and all that. Or about the—eagerness—of counter-revolutionary elements. That signal did it. He must be flown out at once."

"And will he have himself flown out?"

She said, lightly, "It depends on his being given the company he requests."

"Which company does he request?"

She shrugged her shoulders and said nothing.

Toboggen said, "What's behind this, Ursula? Whom does he want?" He stared at her. "But no," he said. "Bebitz wouldn't send

you, would he?" He slapped his emaciated thigh, he had to laugh so much. He grew quiet again. "Silly. You must not listen to what I say. A joke. Because you mentioned you liked him so much—the American." He laughed, and stopped abruptly as she did not join in his hilarity. Quietly, he said, "Silly of me to think that Bebitz would——" He muttered, "Silly."

"Yes," she said. And hesitated, and made up her mind, and said, "Look, Father. There are many things a citizen can do, in a Socialist society. Everything, really. There is one thing a citizen can't do, absolutely not: ask stupid questions. But the relationship to one's father isn't Socialism, is it, strictly speaking? Would you mind—I have often wanted to do it, you see, it's my shortcomings of course, lack of discipline and all, but there it is. And at the stupid questions period of my development—and Mother dead, and you—not available—I had no one to ask. And later at the Academy, in free Socialist competition for the scholarship, and a great thing too, of course—or with the Partisans, we were all busy being heroes, or busy dying, or busy something or other. We were so busy!"

"Meaning that——?" said Toboggen.

She gave a little sigh. "I do so much want to ask you some stupid questions, Father."

He nodded.

She said, "Will four be all right? Well, say twelve. I want twelve. Absolutely."

"Why, yes," he said in a quiet voice.

She sighed. "Oh, I do thank you. It's the fulfilment of a wish from an immature stage of my personal development."

He sat there on the alien iron bed, slovenly, and looked at her. "Quite," he said quietly.

"And with Bebitz," she said, "you couldn't dream of asking stupid questions of Bebitz, could you?"

"Go ahead, child," he said, in a voice that was scarcely audible.

She half closed her eyes. "Look. Private lives. What do our private lives amount to? Nothing. It has been analysed on all levels. Correct? Good. Being a Partisan—I don't happen ever to have been ordered to throw away my private life for the common good; say, get myself blown up with a Nazi munitions train. We tossed for it, in fact. Someone else lost the toss. Won the toss, I ought to have

said, probably. But then, I should have hated to be the one. Heroic and all—but I was in such a funk. I'd never been in such a funk in all my life. Though of course it was years ago, at an immature stage of my— All the same, if I'd lost the toss—won the toss, I mean—I'd have blown myself up. Absolutely. I hope you don't doubt that? Oh, it is good to have someone you can discuss heroism with."

"Heroism?" he said quietly.

She smiled. "Heroism. Funk."

He said, "What are you in a funk about, Ursula?"

"Nothing," she said quickly. "It was an historical observation referring to my youth. My point is, they can give you orders to blow yourself up. Absolutely. Now, they can give you orders to break into a house, say, and—and confiscate something important. Why not? It is correct. Or to take on a job that bores you, even if it bores you to death—type someone's long manuscript although you can't type really, just with one finger. Correct. Journeys, or stay behind, or go underground, or walk about as a sandwichman—all correct, all correct. But where is the limit? Could you be ordered—if it ever occurred to anyone—to have, say, sexual relations with a citizen?" As he started, she went on quickly, "For argument's sake, can't you see? I could just as well have said, could you be ordered to roast and eat your illegitimate children—see? Dialectically. What I ask is, where is the limit?"

Toboggen got up heavily from the dishevelled bed. He straightened his trousers and closed his shirt.

It was not until he reached for his jacket and put it on, and reached for his cap, that Ursula asked, "What are you doing?"

"Get hold of Bebitz," he said hoarsely.

"Why?"

"You know why," he said. He had wanted to hide, he was on the run, he could not face them, but that was forgotten. Gaunt, shaking, he roared, "The swine. I'll break his neck for him."

She looked at him, puzzled. Then she understood. "Bebitz!" she said. "You think that he——" She gave a little laugh that was like the short tinkle of a clear, small bell. "Sexual—you think because I spoke of sexual—and you think, Bebitz——!" Ah, she had to laugh so much, tears were in her eyes, she must laugh so much.

He stood before her, helpless.

"But no," she said between tears and laughter, "no. I know all about sexual relations, as a youth organizing expert, of course. I am not averse from sexual relations. I had some myself, absolutely, with an Outer Mongolian citizen, but then he went to Tibet and all he sent from there—wait, I've got the postcard somewhere; no, I remember now, it must be in my trunk. But—Bebitz!" She laughed again.

"What's funny in that?" Toboggen asked awkwardly.

"For sexual relations, Bebitz is too busy," said Ursula.

"Then what have you been driving at, with your questions?"

Her face changed. Her laughter broke to pieces. It had been a bell of glass. "Nothing," she said. "I warned you it would be stupid questions. That was the agreement, wasn't it? On the limits of—orders." She tried to laugh again. "An order to roast and eat your children, or an order——" She tried to laugh, but her laughter was like a bird with a broken wing. "What's the time?" she said, and got up.

He forced her gently to sit down again. "No," he said quietly. "No, no, child. I am quiet now, and sober. I can't be fooled."

She defended herself. "Nobody is fooling you. It's my free questions day, isn't it? Any questions. What's the dialectics of—anything. Why is the sun big when he comes up over the skyline, and much smaller when he is on top of you? Such questions. Kid's questions." She signed towards the clothes-rack by the door, and in an altered voice, light as a feather, she went on, "Somebody made me a present of a hat tonight, somebody did. Not a desirable citizen. But I should have liked to own such a hat. The colour isn't just the right colour. And the brim—up and down, up and down. Unscientific. It makes you laugh. But I should have liked to have such a hat all the same." She smiled. Tears were in her eyes, suddenly. She said, "I presume you have got a handkerchief? Thank you." She returned it. "I own several handkerchiefs, in my trunk." Tears were in her eyes, she could not smile them away, there were too many.

He looked at her for a long time. He asked, "That's all your questions, Ursula?"

She said, almost inaudible, "Yes. Yes."

He stepped up to her and shook her gently. "Kid," he said, "kid,

wake up. What happened to you? You are stunned. You have been on the great sweep. Streaking past, head in the clouds. Interpreter in international relations. And then, a tree flares up, causing a little riot, the blowing of a bridge, and—" He made a cutting gesture, with the edge of his hand. "Like this. Cut. Stopped. Maybe for a day or two, merely, but stopped all the same. In this village, surrounded by the frozen forests. So how shouldn't you be stunned? It is as if some—all right, I know, you couldn't imagine it, just as I couldn't have imagined it a few years ago, but strange thoughts come to a man in his loneliness, once he has no one to talk to but himself. Yes, it is as if some supreme power, a power infinitely more powerful than Comrade Stalin and the whole Politbureau—God—could you imagine that God might have willed it that you should be stopped here, not merely for the short-lived private consolation of an old man, but so as to have your eyes opened and—see? See our Soviet world as it really is. The back-yard, not the beflagged façade. The graveyard, the teeming millions; the horror; the stifled cry. Not Socialism; but what they made of it. Maybe such a supreme-brain—decided that this is your moment, your opportunity that will never come again. Whatever may come later, you will be undeceived. Maybe that is the reason behind reasons for this—" There was again the cutting gesture of his emaciated hand. "Somebody," he went on, hesitant, in an altered voice, "somebody may have hoped to—find a little time now, for himself and you. The two of us. Just breathe. Just live together. Hidden away, maybe. A foolish dream. Everything simple. Straight. Clean. Read books. The Great Books. I never had time to read them, really. Too busy. And later—too lonely, probably. But now, I thought, maybe there will be a little spell for you and me to read books. Have you any notion of the great books? Not Stalin's Collected Speeches, but—the Great Books! A foolish dream. There will be no time. It will be over in a day. And all the same, what a dream. But however short—it is an act of God. Do they turn somersaults, in their humiliation? All right, call it an act of God's tool. A doubtful commodity—God. Dangerous, too. You make yourself suspicious. But God's tool! I tell you, every sham, every carcase rotting in the frozen wood, every drunkard ridden over roughshod by life and trodden underfoot and left behind—and yet, and yet, he can still be God's tool,

Ursula." He stared at her. "Too abstract for you? Too meta-physical? Undialectic? Suspicious, reactionary, bourgeois? Voice from another generation? Voice out of the grave? Are there no bridges you can build? Can't you ever make yourself understood?"

Ursula put her hand on his heavy hand and stroked it lightly. "Old father," she said, smiling at him in great tenderness.

"Old?"

She nodded many times. "In the Partisans," she said after a while, smiling forlornly, "we had a case once—not like this one, nothing diplomatic. A real case. They caught our commander, the Nazis did, and hanged him. We were all young and without experience. We chose a local comrade to be our next commander, an old Party member, and he knew all the paths in the woods and bogs. We lost forty-seven comrades in the three weeks after he took over. Then we found out that he was a traitor. Pishkyn was his name. He was in their pay. His wife had a house down in the village; we found the Nazis' money in the house, and their food, a ton of potatoes, stacks of tins, while we—there wasn't very much to eat. He could have betrayed us all in one, but he just sent out patrols, which never returned. It was his joke. He sent out girl comrades in the patrols. They were all raped, as we found out later, before they were done to death. I was to be on such a patrol the very day we found him out. That's why it fell to me—it was the first time I killed one. He was sleeping in his house that night. And you could not use a gun—the Nazis were quartered next door. And his wife was sleeping in the same bed with him. It was the first time I had to do such a thing. Pishkyn was his name. There were only thirty-six of us left after that. And no food, and no ammunition, and no leader, and five disappeared in one night, just went home, and three the night after, and then another six, and there were only twenty-two of us, and the comrades of the District Command of Partisan Forces mistrusted us, or they had moved, or run away for all we knew; we could not get in touch with them, and a peasant we met told us that the Soviet Union was lost, Moscow lost, lost everything—What did we do? We called a meeting for criticism, and of the twenty-two we sent home sixteen. Six of us left, that was all there was left of us, six. And in the heart of a forest, and for all we knew we were the only six left in all Russia. Now, what would

you have wanted us to do? Be undeceived about the Soviet Union? Cured of Communism? Because Pishkyn was a traitor? Or because we were only six?" She paused, and said, "Bebitz wasn't cured of Communism, was he, because of what those culturally backward comrades did to his wife?"

Toboggen said, "Then—I don't understand."

She laughed lightly, "That I talk like an official heroine? And that at the same time I rebel against the limits of discipline—Socialism making a mess of our private lives? And that at the same time I want that hat? For I want the hat very much, scientific brim or no scientific brim. It's all at the same time." Tears were in her eyes again. Smiling through her tears, she said in a very light voice, "It's just that I am afraid." She listened. And nodded. "That's Bebitz," she said, almost inaudible.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HE was outside in the corridor. Through the door's crack he saw that there was a light in Ursula's room. He knocked and came in at once. He had found her at last. His feet were heavy, exhaustion was written on his grey face. He started as he saw Toboggen. He did not seem to have expected to find him here.

"Ah, Bebitz," said Toboggen, trying desperately to look unconcerned. "You're just in time. I've been indulging in subversive activities. Making propaganda for God." He tried to laugh; a wretched laughter; and stopped.

"That you, Toboggen?" Bebitz said.

Toboggen said, "By means of subversive propaganda for God——" He stopped again.

Bebitz said, "So that's where you are, Ursula."

She said, "You were looking for me?"

He nodded. "I was looking for you."

She said, "To tell me of—new developments?"

He stood there, immobile.

She said, "Are there no new developments?"

He held on to the back of a chair. His face was white. He said, "None."

She asked, "What's the hour?"

"It's getting late," he said.

"Late, and no change?" she said.

His lips seemed to tremble towards a word, but he said nothing.

She got up, smiling. "I'll go down for a bit," she said very lightly. She held out her hand to him.

Bebitz took a few folded sheets from his pocket and gave them to her. "Go down for a bit?" he said awkwardly. "Do." He sat down, utterly exhausted.

Toboggen said, "Ursula, confirm that I tried, by means of subversive propaganda for God——" No one listened to him. He stopped.

The girl stepped up to the little mirror that was hung close to

her bed, and tidied her hair, ~~sp~~ filing all the time. The two men's eyes were on her, all through their silence.

Smiling, she turned. And left the room. You could see her standing there outside in the corridor for a moment. And disappear.

Toboggen got up, as if wanting to follow her. "Ursula," he said quietly.

Bebitz said, "I wonder if I could have some——"

"A drink?" Toboggen laughed again. Laughing, he looked for the empty bottle he had kicked away. But as he looked at the other man he stopped. There was a coarsely made carafe with water, and a glass. "Where is she going?" he said.

Bebitz sat there, drinking water.

Toboggen said, "Never drink, eh? Never smoke? No vice, no sin, no deviation?"

Bebitz said, "You despise me, Toboggen."

"Do I?" said Toboggen. "Or is it you that despises me? A man long dead whose shadow happens to be still walking." He laughed, and went on drily, "You put your money on a dead horse, Bebitz, and you know by now. The late Toboggen. No asset to your career."

Bebitz looked at him. Had he not sat on a chair but on the bed, he would have sunk sideways and fallen asleep that moment. He said, "You hate me, Toboggen. Was it like this in your days too, in the days of Lenin and of—that other man——" His voice gave out.

Toboggen looked at him for a long time. "What?" he asked.

Bebitz said, "Did they too hate man, and love mankind?"

Toboggen started laughing again. "Young man, be on your guard, or else—— Ever been arrested at two in the morning out of your cosy bed? The arc lamp shining into your eyes for three weeks day and night, and—'Who hired you as a counter-revolutionary wrecker, and whom did you hire, and who hired you?' A woman might moan and yell next door. Tortured. But don't be bluffed. It'd be a trick. Girl secretary who'd been in amateur theatricals." He laughed again, and stopped. "Just joking," he said quietly. "What did you ask? Did we old revolutionaries too—hate man and love mankind?" He stared at him. "That your case?"

Bebitz nodded, and nodded rapidly, many times.

Toboggen said, "You're just tired."

Bebitz shook his head.

"Lie down and sleep," Toboggen said soberly. "I was hiding here. Nerves. Trembling. But I am quiet now. I'll have a look round. How much time is there left to me before you pack me off to the woods again? I'll look for Utsula. You are overworked."

"No," said Bebitz. "I haven't worked enough. And I haven't worked well enough."

Toboggen sat down by him. "Is that it?" he asked. "Not worked well enough? Because of the business with the American, because it doesn't come off, owing to some unforeseen little complications? But you'll talk them into believing that it is a great triumph anyway. You have done that by now, probably. Have you? Or is that triumph—your failure?"

Bebitz said, "How you despise me, Toboggen. But you are right. I ought to have asked to be relieved of my assignment. But when there is a chance of success, you don't. When there is a setback you can't. So when is there a time for you to resign?"

"Socialist self-criticism?" said Toboggen.

Bebitz said, "I haven't exercised Socialist self-criticism since—when have I exercised it, really? Never. Some hypocritical show of humility in public sometimes, maybe. But the real thing?"

Toboggen laughed. "Now, this is getting serious. Wanting to confess? Most difficult, Bebitz. A highly specialized job—confessing. Never try just to implicate the dead, it would not do, it would be thrown back into your face like an ink-stained home exercise you'd brought to school. It's still best that you confess you hired everyone, the whole Communist Who's-Who, and that you have been hired by every telephone subscriber in the Moscow directory. And by your closest friends; never forget your friends." He laughed. And started trembling. And stopped. "Just joking," he said hoarsely, trying to laugh again. "Just my joke. Being in a humorous mood, owing to the whiff of freedom you granted me. Don't take any notice, Bebitz. But you—confessions, confessions. Bebitz, you ought to be a Catholic."

Bebitz jumped up. "I insist," he exclaimed, "I insist on being told what you mean by that remark. Are they talking about me

behind my back? Has Ursula——?" He stopped, and sat down abruptly.

"Bebitz, Bebitz," Toboggen said quietly.

"I am sorry," said Bebitz, exhausted. He took out his impeccable handkerchief and dried his brow.

"You want a rest," said Toboggen. The terrible hilarity had deserted him.

"I shall write it down, everything," said Bebitz. "No fear, I'll send it in. I'll stand up and denounce myself. When I realized that my plan could not be carried out just as I had conceived it, that this pride of my brains, subtly balanced, threatened to tumble down owing to some stupid hitch—I wished the ground to open beneath me, for me to be wiped out. The world crashing about my ears: that's how I took the failure of my vanity." He breathed heavily. "It took me a whole hour standing in the dark outside the house before I recovered and saw that they were right, that I had been wrong, governed by private emotions, a traitor almost, when I opposed their decision that the American must go. The subtle greatness of that decision did not penetrate into my head for a whole hour. And what next? So I thought what if he after all escapes his fate and really gets to Vladivostok and meets Zarotyn, who might still persuade him, and succeed where I failed, and clinch the deal? That was what I was thinking of—not of Ursula. A whole hour; only then it overwhelmed me—Ursula, Ursula! And I went and—faced her. I realize that such a man as myself is not fit to wield Socialist responsibility. And do you know why?"

"Bebitz——" said Toboggen.

He waved away the interruption. "Do you know why? Because the thought that Zarotyn might succeed was against the grain of my vanity. Maybe there are some who suspect me, but never, Toboggen, never did the Party fathom the depth of my vanity. I hid it, slyly, but I am vain. It would not have been nearly as necessary as I made out, to rig up this whole scheme. I was never asked to do it. I just thought I might snatch the success. That is what put me out when I noticed—I foisted the venture on my Department, and now I stand defeated by my own vanity. At the expense of the prestige of my superiors in the eyes of those in the know. Prestige, I said; but it is at the expense of our most vital interests.

Why, I ask myself. Why. And I'll tell you why. Because I do not take the guiding example of my betters. I am restless. The real Party worker—like a modest brick in an imposing edifice. The real Socialist ought to sit it out. No antics. It is our strength that we need no antics. Zarotyń—Stone Arse: that's his name in the Party. There is a name for you. The greatness of it. Stalin. Steel. Stone. Majestic. I accuse myself of never having so much as tried. Ineffectually hankering after the Great Decree. That's why the ones like myself don't command the language of the masses. They listen—but they don't love me. A Tretjak, a Yakut is more of a stone arse than myself. Walter M. Watkins, even the Capitalist Watkins in his own way—that's why he impresses me, that's why I wrestled with him for weeks, ineffectually. Stone arse, even he." He paused, and asked, hesitant, "Ursula told you?"

"What?"

"About Watkins."

"Yes."

"And you—don't despair? You don't cry out? There you are. Even you—a stouter heart. For I do cry out, maudibly. I suffer, Toboggen. While I sit here talking to you—my ear is there, my heart is there."

"Where?"

"Toboggen," said Bebitz, "I humiliate myself before you and confess that I suffer agonies." He listened. "Was that Ursula's voice?"

"Ursula?" They were both listening.

Bebitz said, "The lie: that's at the root of it all. My lie. I never told anyone. I shall tell them, though. You are the first to hear it. When I applied for Party membership—years and years back. How many years? An ambitious enthusiast: that's my only plea in mitigation. Fear of not being accepted. Back home in Estonia, at Tallinn. So I told a lie. You don't know anything about it, do you? Because a few minutes ago, when you made that remark about being a Catholic, I suspected——" He stopped.

"What's up?"

Bebitz was still listening. "Nothing," he said at last. And was still listening. And said, "I wrote the lie in my curriculum, in the Party membership application. Social background? Father? A

riveter, I wrote. Honest proletarian family. In fact, I knew by then that my mother had been housekeeper to a priest before she married the riveter. I was born seven months later. I made investigations, secretly. Seven months later, alleged to have been a seven months' child. The midwife was still alive when I investigated it. She confirmed: a seven months' child. But what if she was a party to a conspiracy? No proof, you will say. But what is proof, once you start thinking? What if my mother married the riveter with the priest's money to cover up her pregnancy? Priest's bastard. That's my doubt that is at the root of everything. I ought to have confessed the doubt in my application. You can't bury the doubt. It makes you—ambitious. It makes you stick your neck out and improvise diplomatic manoeuvres that are not wanted. It makes you—do you know how my wife died?" He stopped, listening. He asked, "Was that—an aeroplane?"

"An aeroplane?" said Toboggen.

They were both listening.

Toboggen said, "I hear nothing."

"Nothing——" Bebitz said, shivering. He controlled himself. "Do you know how my wife died?" he went on. "We were under cover, at Tallinn, when the Red Army marched in. Party instructions. Don't declare yourself to the first soldier you meet—wait for the Political Commissar. There had been some unpleasantness by then; misunderstandings; that's why. We were sitting in a cellar, my wife and I and others. The Nazis had gone, in fact we had blown up the bridge; they had to clear out over pontoons. The first Red Army patrol came up outside; we could watch them; they put up a mortar just outside our cellar window. Usbeks or Kazaks. I could hear them speak; it wasn't Russian. Men dusty with the dirt of a thousand miles' advance. Wild men, with wild, cold eyes. Just plain Asiatic seldicks, not one officer to be seen, just an advance patrol; they had probably lost their N.C.O. You'd rather make yourself understood to a brick wall. But me? Wait? Oh no. Come along, I said. My wife——" He stopped. "That's an aeroplane," he said, whispering.

There was silence.

He went on, hoarsely, trembling. "Come along," I said. My wife wouldn't. I shouted at her. Come along. The priest's bastard who

can't wait a minute; must embrace the world proletariat right now. Come along, I roared at her. We stepped outside. They covered us with their tommy-guns. Comrades, I said in Russian, this is our great hour; I greet you, Comrades, on behalf of the local Communist Party at this hour of liberation, and if you, Comrades—I stopped, yes, I was irritated, yes I could see they understood me well enough. But they all—six, there were six of them—they all looked at my left arm. What was there wrong with my left arm, or hand? Comrades, I said, the hour of liberation—and the first of them pointed at my wrist. And then he made a little inviting gesture with his index finger—come! Let's have it! And —Tchasy, that's what he said. Your watch. Comrades, I said, we, the international proletariat. They made the same little gesture first, pointing at my wife. Only then——" He stopped, swaying a little as he sat there on his chair. His face was livid. He went on, "Only then—they didn't even lead her away. Just by the roadside. They didn't even care to—hold me, or threaten me—or—— They just didn't take any notice that I was alive."

His voice gave out. With an odd, somehow laughable movement he bent sideways, and fell. Toboggen jumped there, to his assistance, but he got up all by himself and tied himself and sat down again.

"You poor dog," Toboggen said. "You poor dog."

Bebitz said icily, "Citizen, I shall thank you if you will not take advantage of my act of personal self-criticism. I did not crave for your pity." He was still trying to sit stiffly upright, and was still swaying.

He started. There was—yes, this was the feeble, spluttering engine of a small aeroplane. With a tortured face, torn with emotion, Bebitz said, "I was even too cowardly to bully them into confessing in so many words that they sabotaged the plane. I don't bring any luck to women."

Toboggen stared at him. His lips moved, but he could not find his voice. Voiceless, he asked, "Ursula——?"

Bebitz said, "She told you, didn't she? You said she told you."

"Ursula," said Toboggen. For a moment it looked as if he were about to throw himself on Bebitz. But he changed his mind. Stumbling out of the room into the corridor, boor-clattering down

the stairs, he shouted, "Ursula!" Bebitz sat there, stiff, upright. "Ursula!" Toboggen shouted, somewhere down in the house, invisible. Glass splintered; the entrance door? "Ursula!" his voice came up now from the street outside. "Ursula!" Other voices had woken up by then, a murmur, not to be unravelled. "Ursula!" Toboggen's voice was out there, far off; he must be running.

The shuffling of many feet, the mutter of many voices was swelling rapidly.

One of them called out, "The plane's gone."

One asked, "With the American?"

One said, "No. She left him behind."

One muttered, "Good for him, too. She won't fly far."

A woman asked, "What's the matter?"

"Oh," said a man's voice, "just a suicide."

Toboggen, at that time, was still running. He had reached the end of Stalin Boulevard, where the dirt track starts, out to the camp. A house was standing there, deserted. He stumbled past it, panting, "Ursula!" There was a hut, deserted. He stumbled past it. There were no more houses now.

Round the bend, a last isolated log cabin was burning fiercely. There was no one about. Past it, the panting man stumbled on, shouting, "Ursula! Ursula!"

He met the Camp men at the next bend.

CHAPTER XXIX

It was Borodin, Camp Commandant, walking among twenty soldiers of the Ministry. He shouted, "Here he is!"

Toboggen had stopped. His whole gaunt body was heaving under his panting breath. Desperation was in his eyes. Gasping, he said, "I am giving myself up."

Borodin said, "What's that?" The twenty, or thirty, crowded about the two men. Their faces were lit up by the fire.

Toboggen said, "I lit the maypole. I gave the signal for the revolt."

"We know," said one of the men. They were all laughing.

Toboggen looked into their laughter, puzzled. "I caused the Camp to riot, to force my child to stop here. I am giving myself up."

The one-eyed sergeant came up, with ten of his men, with fifty in the garb of prisoners. "What's that?"

Borodin, laughing, called out to him, "He's giving himself up."

"Toboggen," some of the prisoners shouted. "Toboggen." The shout was passed back, down to the river bend. Men, prisoners, came up the road.

The one-eye shouted, "He gave the great signal."

Toboggen, looking about him with frightened eyes, muttered, "I wanted to keep my child. It killed her."

They stood about him. One said, "He hasn't woken up to it yet." There were now a hundred standing there.

One said, "You gave the signal, Toboggen. The whole Camp knew by then you had come back from the woods alive, with the help of the American. So when your signal came we overpowered the guards. They'll march with us. Toboggen alive! This is the day."

Toboggen was trembling heavily. "You're mad," he said, voiceless. "Before twenty-four hours are over they'll bathe in your blood."

They laughed. One said, "You're joking. You led a revolution before."

Toboggen, trembling, said, "No. Oh no, no." He shook his

head. "No, no, no," he said. His teeth were chattering. He whispered, "I killed my child."

Another large group of men from the camp had come up. "Toboggen," they shouted. "Toboggen." The reflection of the fire lay on their faces. They carried guns. They had a heavy machine-gun on a truck.

"From the watch tower," one of the men explained, laughing. His white teeth shone in the firelight. They looked like a skeleton's.

They were all Kontriks. Yes, there was something of the skeleton, of death, of ghoulish resurrection from the grave, about each of them. One, in front of them all, a tall, bony man with a shaven skull, ageless, clad in rags, tottering with fatigue, spread his arms as he came up, with two, three others—a deputation?—and called out, "Toboggen! Antoni Maximovich! Comrade, don't you recognize me?" There he stood, with spread arms.

Toboggen stared at him. "No," he said very quietly.

The skeleton said, "I'm Marshal Piotogloff." Ah, he was the Red Marshal of October Revolution fame, Trotsky's right-hand man in the Crimea, the one who survived his master because he was the great brain in tanks. Tears sprang to his dead man's eyes as he pointed to the one next to him, a man who must have been fat once, and was now yellow, a half-emptied sack of yellowness, and clad in sackings, and someone had broken his nose for him. He pointed at him and said, "And this is——" Ah, tears in his throat, he could not speak.

"Ragoshin," the sack said, smiling, with an empty mouth, someone must have smashed out his teeth for him—but he was still the great political thinker, the propagandist, the orator, the founder of Agitprop, Brilliance Ragoshin, and still living.

"Friends," Toboggen said, whispering, "I killed my child."

The Marshal said, "And this——"

A ghoul, a putrid corpse, dragged from the grave, fingerless, with eyes without pupils, so that it was a miracle in itself that he could see and walk, started laughing, and bowing, and laughing—ah, he was convulsed with laughter. "Antoni Maximovich," he said amidst bursts of hilarity, "I am Yorkov of the Ministry, the man who had you on the Konveyer for seven weeks until you broke and gave the signature." Ah, he had to laugh so much, Ivan

the Terrible Yorkov, who had delivered Toboggen and the other thirty-six to Vishynski that day, plucked and trussed, on a platter, as it were, for the public performance, and now there he was himself, ah, he had to laugh. A hundred and a hundred had by then collected about them, laughing, spectres, forgotten men, but there they were with their feeble strength and had survived it all and were still living.

Toboggen looked about him. He had started trembling. Yes, he was trembling heavily. "Is Kurilko alive?" he asked

"Shot in '38," said a laughing face. "In the cellar of Lubianka prison."

Toboggen asked, "Is Januszevski alive?"

A ghoul said, "Died in the Igarka mines." He tittered.

Toboggen said, "Malsagov?"

"Killed," said a skeleton. Five were laughing now.

Voiceless, Toboggen asked, "And Valyagin? And Sokharov? And Klin?"

"Dead, dead, dead!" Five, six, sixteen were laughing now. Ah, the great roll-call. Shot in the neck administratively. Shot in the neck under sentence. Shot in the neck while resisting arrest. Hanged for maliciously failing to reach the minimum labour norm while felling a tree. Hanged for participating in a whispering campaign with seventeen others regarding the state of the Soviet Union. Frozen to death in the isolator for having drawn a cartoon. Frozen to death for purposely limping on parade. Frozen to death while dragging tree trunks. Frozen to death while building a road. Driven to death in the lead mines. Driven to death in the copper mines. Driven to death in the tinning plant, packing fish. Kicked to death in the riot. Kicked to death by the guards when they walked too slow. When they stole that quarter loaf. When they were caught making love to that girl. Dead of tuberculosis. Dead of malaria. Dead of hunger typhus. Dead just of hunger. Dead of having drunk that bottle of methylated spirit. Dead of having been purged under suspicion of having swallowed gold. Suicide jumping out of the window. Suicide jumping out of the train. Suicide hanging. Suicide swallowing broken glass. Dead, dead, dead—ah, the great roll-call, but they were the laughing survivors and would live evermore.

'Toboggen said, "Comrades. One camp revolting. It will be over soon, and then——"

He stopped as he looked into their laughing faces. Ah, they had to laugh so much. Did he not know they had lit signals in turn, over to Arman Camp?

"Arman is in revolt," one man said.

Another, "Magadan in revolt."

"Nagayev. They hanged the guards."

"Shaivinsk, the Valley of Death—in revolt."

"Talon."

"And the camps of Srednekolymsk, with the straight line of signals over to Indigirka country."

"To Chita country."

"To Khabarovsk."

Protogcroff, Marshal, with tears streaming, exclaimed, "Toboggen, this is the Revolution."

Yorkov shouted, "1917!"

Ragoshin said quietly, "Toboggen, don't you see that you must lead us? We, the ten million forgotten men. What have they made of our world? We shall begin at the beginning."

There were a thousand now. "Toboggen," they said, crowding about him. "Toboggen."

He stood there, swaying. He whispered, "Friends—— I killed my child!"

The reflection was still on their faces. But the fire was burning lower now. A first greyness rose into the Eastern sky.

CHAPTER XXX

SOME facts.

That part of the world, Kolyma, in the Siberian North-East, has lain utterly waste, in utter solation, until a very short while ago. There is the Arctic Sea up North, the Okhotsk Sea to the East, and to the South and West there are the forests—taiga, impenetrable. It is the country with the lowest temperatures ever encountered: minus 93 degrees Fahrenheit. Rivers are ice-bound for eight or nine months out of twelve. There is polar night for two months or more. But for a thin upper layer, the soil is permanently frozen. Man's life in those regions is a perpetual fight against that perennial ice. Upon his arrival, he would find it two inches below the surface. In a desperate struggle of cultivation, he would make it retreat, down to three feet, to six feet below ground. It returns, the moment he leaves off struggling. Only that uppermost layer of two inches or of a foot or two melts in the summer months, into a mire breeding myriads of mosquitoes, midges, gadflies, gnats; among them a large gadfly whose sting can pierce deer-hide and drive a horse to frenzy. There are twelve weeks of this summer; a two weeks' spring; and a two weeks' autumn.

Polar nights and blizzards are merciless. You must tether yourself to your doorpost before stepping outside your cabin, or else you will never find your way back to it. In summer, the country is melancholy and beautiful. Clear water in deep, safe anchorages cutting into steep coastal hills; hills upon hills behind them stretching into pale blue distances, outlined against pale blue skies; clumps of larch trees, with large violet or bright red patches between them—Ivan-Tchai, or the Fire Herb. The swamps, too, the bogs unending, the vast mire. Also, the loneliness. The census of 1926 showed anything between fifty and one hundred square miles to one inhabitant. They are hunters, fishers, breeders of reindeer—nomads travelling with the tides of season, disaster, and opportunity.

There were local tales of single men having found gold at some hidden place or other in the forests, and having died too quickly to

pass on the secret to their sons; but encyclopedias had it that this was "a country poor in products of the mineral kingdom".

In 1910, a fugitive convict, whose first name was Boriska and whose second name is unknown, brought a small bag of gold out of the forests on the upper Kolyma river and sold it to a trader. News of his find spread quickly, but that region proved so inaccessible, and that man Boriska so desperately mistrustful, that, in spite of frantic attempts to bully or cajole him into leading an expedition, he remained in sole possession of his secret. After the first world war he went there once more—once more alone. He died of starvation, in his goldfield. It is now called Boriskin, and is one of the richest on the upper Kolyma river.

Six years after Boriska's death, in 1924, the Soviet Government issued an amnesty for members of those remnants of anti-Bolshevik armies that were still hiding all over Soviet Asia. Among those who surrendered was an officer named Nikolayev; out of the forests between the Indigirka and Kolyma rivers he brought a quantity of platinum to Yakutsk. That was the cause of two simultaneous developments: an expedition sent to the region by the Soviet Academy of Science—and a gold rush by "free gold seekers".

What they found—there were sixty-five of them working in 1929—ought to have gone, by law, to the Soviet Government Gold Trust down at Okhotsk, but that authority was more than a thousand miles from the goldfields—a thousand miles of impenetrable taiga forest. Private traders stepped in. In spite of savage efforts to suppress them, they cut a road of their own through the taiga, paying vastly more than the official price—and a good deal of it in foodstuffs, equipment and other goods, which on investigation turned out to bear the label "Made in Japan." Japanese fishing smacks were found to have landed in the deserted coves of the Okhotsk Sea, and to have gone again, with the gold.

Efforts at retrieving the situation failed. Bribes, higher prizes, mining concessions offered to the private prospectors proved unavailing. Foreign credits—to open up the country and buy machinery—were unobtainable; hence Bebitz's plan to enlist Walter M. Watkins's help. Even for short-term bills the Soviet Government was made to pay a discount ten times as high as any small European state—anything up to fifty per cent a year. At the

same time, getting at the Kolyma gold must mean the solution of all their troubles. It was a vicious circle which could be broken only by one device: replace capital and equipment by human lives. And as that coincided with measures on a large scale against peasants, national minorities, intellectuals, foreigners, right deviationists, left deviationists, alleged saboteurs and slackers, everybody's scapegoats, and the victims of everybody's denunciations against everybody else—a vast, ever-filling reservoir of human material that had to be drained and disposed of anyway—then exploitation, for those pioneer schemes and bold industrial enterprises going begging for want of capital, meant killing two problem birds at one savage throw.

It was the only solution; a decision reached by sober dialectical thinking. Also, common criminals—yet another army available for the purpose—might still be redeemed and turned into good citizens; but those millions of political dissidents would never be redeemed; captivity would only enhance their hostility; they had better die. Though it would have been both inhuman and uneconomical to dispose of them Nazi-fashion, hysterically, sadistically, with gas chambers and all that. It was dialectically correct to treat them less well than the socially redeemable criminals—but only well enough to preserve their working capacity; and to feed them in accordance with that capacity, with diminishing rations as that capacity declined—with a nominal ration, fit to die on, in the end.

All that was done coolly, soberly, without malice. Individual acts of cruelty were discouraged, and even severely punished when found out. Corruption, non-existent at the centre, was more frequent as you moved farther afield, and rampant in the remoter ramifications of the vast network. Health services do exist. You may survive a first sentence, if you are young, strong, and very healthy. If you are not, you have only yourself to blame. Mortality, in the milder Kolyma camps, is about twenty per cent. In the more severe camps it is twenty-five per cent. No Camp Commandant could let it rise above thirty-three per cent, or one third of his prisoners, without risking an investigation and severe punishment for inefficiency.

As for figures, according to the census of 1926 the population of the region was 7,580. A young Soviet seaman, who for several

years sailed in the prison ships plying between Vladivostok and Magadan, states in the *Socialist Courier*, a Menshevik paper now published in America, that meanwhile the entire Kolyma region has been turned into "a single concentration camp. Into it have been thrown huge masses of the repressed. It may be calculated with considerable accuracy that between 1937 and 1940 a million and a half persons were brought to Magadan in those steamers. There were four in operation, each making from twelve to fifteen runs between April and November each year, bringing between six and nine thousand prisoners on each trip."

According to other sources, another five steamers and the icebreaker *Sakhalin* were drafted into the service, with an additional shipping capacity of thirty-five thousand persons each trip. Boris Nicolaevsky, co-author of the work, *Forced Labour in Soviet Russia*, published by Yale University, drawing on many sources and statements by former prisoners, assesses "the shipment of slave colonists in Kolyma, even disregarding other shipments over the Arctic sea route, at four to five hundred thousand each year." On the other hand, as the total number of convicts and other forced labourers in that region seems, according to the same source, to be fairly stable between one and a half and two million persons, the all-over average mortality probably lies between twenty and twenty-five per cent.

That does not, of course, include such pioneering efforts as the one told by Commandant Borodin to Toboggen regarding the expedition to Gaudy Bight Dresva, when of eight hundred free citizens only two hundred and of more than six thousand prisoners only one hundred and fifty were brought back to Magadan Hospital where Elinor Lipper worked.

Or the original expedition of 1932 to the bight of Nagayev, where Magadan was built—sawmill, brickyard, fish-salting factory, power plant, administration office blocks, private houses for the officials and their servants, "cold resistant" barracks for the police troops, a special house for the bloodhounds trained to trail the escaping and to fell the recalcitrant—everything except huts for the prisoners themselves, so that, "returning exhausted by the day's work, the men in their wet clothing dropped to the sparsely covered ground. The clothes grew mouldy on the men's bodies,

the men fell sick, epidemics broke out, mortality rose at a catastrophic rate. That would not in itself have disturbed the authorities, but the epidemics spread to the G.P.U. troops, and this caused great alarm."

Or those other pioneering efforts when a road was to be built in record time from Magadan to the upper reaches of the Kolyma river, and, as Nicolaevsky writes, "What went on in some of the winter camps during the weeks of blizzard remained a mystery, since no living beings were left—neither prisoners nor guards, nor even dogs. One of the valleys, since named 'The Valley of Death', is the place where several thousand prisoners with all their guards lost the way in the blizzard and died to a man. It was said later in Magadan that in that first 'heroic' year only one out of fifty or a hundred came back."

Or such cases as that of the *Dzhurma*, a large ship crammed to bursting point with twelve thousand prisoners. It was to go from Vladivostok to the mouth of the Kolyma in the Arctic Sea; it went too late, it was caught in the pack ice. So it did not arrive until next spring. It did not land a single prisoner. On their way back to Vladivostok, nearly half the crew had to be treated for mental disorders.

Nicolaevsky writes, "In the same winter the famous *Chelyuskin* became locked in the ice, was crushed and sank, but the members of the expedition set up a camp. There was only one way to rescue them—by air—and many persons in the United States were anxious to undertake the task. All such offers of help were declined; it was 'a matter of national honour for Russia to save her sons'. The evidence that has since come through suggests that national honour was merely a screen to hide quite different motives. The place where the *Chelyuskin* party were waiting for deliverance was not far from the wintering place of the *Dzhurma* and its twelve thousand prisoners doomed to death. Moscow feared that American flyers might by accident uncover the terrible secret of the *Dzhurma* martyrs."

The responsibility for this explanation is Nicolaevsky's. What seems to be certain is that the twelve thousand disappeared. They, and those others of Gaudy Bight, of the Kolyma Road, and of Magadan, are left out in computing the average rate of mortality.

As for overall figures of slave labourers in the Soviet Union, estimates vary. Kravchenko says that "in official circles twenty millions became the accepted estimate"; Brooks Atkinson, returned from Moscow, writes, "The estimates run all the way from ten to fifteen millions"; Vasili Petrukhov, a former Red Army man, writes that "by the end of 1943 not only common people in Siberia but even the administration mentioned a figure of twenty-four millions in the camps"; Mora and Zwerniak, two Polish officers, write that "the Polish prisoners were deported to Russia in 1939 and later were told by the prison guards who were boasting of Russia's power and bigness: 'Poland has scarcely thirty-five million inhabitants; in our country, we have that many prisoners alone!'"

D. J. Dallin deems those figures highly exaggerated; he speaks of seven to twelve millions. German diplomatic despatches of 1939 mention nine millions and six hundred thousand. Western statesmen seem of late to stick to "approximately ten millions"—ninety per cent of whom are males—out of an adult male population of just over forty millions in the whole Soviet Union.

Those were the facts and figures Marshal Protogeroff, Brilliance Ragoshin and Ivan the Terrible Yorkov had in mind when they urged Toboggen to lead them. "We," said Ragoshin, "we, the ten million forgotten men. What have they made of our world? We shall begin at the beginning."

The reflection was still on their faces, but the fire was burning lower now. A first greyness rose into the Eastern sky.

CHAPTER XXXI

"НѢХТ," said Yorkov.

They had requisitioned the Cultinst, they were sitting in the assembly hall; they had requisitioned the stocks of the Staprodisc with ten dozen candles; candles were burning right and left and fore and aft but did not light up the room, whose emptiness echoed their voices hollowly. Guards stood by the doors; Militia men who had thrown in their lot with them, all but those five who had been too slow making up their minds; and prisoners from the Camp, there were a thousand, there were two thousand prisoners, all armed, they had taken and thrown open the prison up the street, and the rifle store. The meeting was open for all, just as in far back October Revolution days, but the free men were still frightened and the prisoners so new to their freedom that they'd rather strut about outside in Stalin Boulevard. Scarcely a score of them had come inside to listen to the proceedings; there was a scant trickle to and fro through the guarded doors; only faces appeared there time and again, to look inside, to shout a slogan, to disappear.

As for the proceedings, they happened on the stage. It was the same table Tretjak and Bebitz and their men had used for the same purpose a little while ago—a century ago, in a different life, at a different stage of humanity. The men sitting there now were Toboggen, for twenty minutes now provisionally elected President of the Supreme Soviet of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, temporarily still headquartered at Poshansk; Protogeroff, Marshal of the Red Army, recalled to active duty from illegally enforced retirement; Comrade Ragoshin, Editor-in-Chief of *Pravda*, temporarily deposed by counter-revolutionary plotters headed by that man Stalin, partner of the notorious Stalin-Hitler Pact, and—until they double-crossed the double-crosser—presumably an agent in Fascist pay; against whom and his henchmen a warrant for close arrest was going to be issued by Comrade Yorkov, Public Prosecutor, the moment telegraphic and other means of communication were restored—which might well take a few hours or even days.

It was indeed this problem that was in the forefront of the minds of all participants in the conference. Not young men, and not very well fed and clad of late, and assaulted in this last hour by great emotions, they were swaying with tiredness, but they would not grant themselves a rest.

"Next," said Yörkov, hollow-eyed, striding himself at the table's edge (A shouting face in the door—"Freedom and 'Toboggen!"—and disappeared again. Ah, they were still under the spell of their inebriation out there in the street, new slogans would have to be coined, devoid of sycophantic hero-worship, slogans soberly inspiring. Brilliance Ragoshin would see to that.) "Next" Steadying himself on the table.

Borodin got up, in the first row of the audience. He said, "Borodin, formerly forced by the Stalinist-Fascist dictatorship so that he must hide how he always hated the willing tools of world reaction posing as Communists, and that's why I must act as Camp Commandant, to prevent my office being held by some sadistic slave-driver in the pay of Fascist Stalinism."

"You slave-drove well enough," a voice said from the door.

Borodin turned his melancholy, hunted hind's eyes there, blinking with his eyelids as if expecting to be hit. "Did I not go over to you at once? What can Soviet man do more? I liberated you! Occasional harshness, you might say—but what is occasional harshness—what, brothers, is harsh? Winter is harsh. Life is harsh. Even—yes, even marriage is harsh. So how can man avoid being harsh sometimes? My acts of harshness were, first, not as bad as suggested; second, they never happened anyway and are lying inventions, comrades, by politically suspect elements, and third, only put on by me so as to hide my real feelings and keep my position in the interests of all counter-revolutionary—I meant to say, revolutionary prisoners."

Yörkov looked at Ragoshin, who shrugged his shoulders, muttering, "Small fry." He looked at Toboggen, who had been sitting there, motionless, this last half hour. He still sat there motionless. He turned once more to Borodin and said, "The Comrade President of the Supreme Soviet is stricken with a great sorrow. We owe it to him to find the man responsible for the foul murder of—" He paused, and asked icily, "Did you sabotage the plane?"

Borodin exclaimed, "I! Never. On my proletarian word of—!" He stopped.

"There will be terrible retribution," Yoikov said quietly. He looked at the Marshal.

Protogeroff, tall, gaunt, bony, got up militarily. In the last hour he had come by a tunic somehow. He had torn off the insignia. No insignia for a marshal of the people. He asked Borodin harshly, "Are you a soldier? Can you fight?"

Borodin looked at him, hinged-eyed and non-committal.

"Comrades," said Protogeroff, "let me explain the situation to this citizen, and to you all. Through years in camp, from my memory, and with the assistance of other men, I have drawn a strategic map of this district, here on this piece of shirt. Here it is, Comrades. Preserved for this day. And in this last hour—first hour, rather—my first errand was to the school house, to requisition maps. This elementary school atlas: that is all I found. But as you can see here—here!—it corroborates my own drawing. To decide what to do next, we must first consider figures. What we have here are three thousand six hundred men—five thousand last year, minus one year's deaths, which have not yet been replaced. Of them, a thousand and a half are again marked by death by now: exhaustion, and frozen limbs, and tuberculosis, and—you know how it is, Comrades. Maybe some of them will now live, but they are no fighters. That leaves us two thousand, three thousand with free men and force-settlers and guards who throw in their lot with us. Those marked by death must give up their arms, which many of them have seized; they will protest, but they must give them up: then we can arm our three thousand. Lightly, at least. Plus twelve machine-guns. That is what we have. With these three thousand I shall strike—here. No, not to the coast! What should we have achieved, standing at a deserted coast? I shall strike South-West, as soon as—in twenty-four hours, say. There is the Ministry troops' garrison standing there in Tashinsk, with field-guns, as we know, and flame-throwers and—ah, with many things. They could annihilate us easily, but are we afraid? Where would we have got if we had been afraid—where would we get? The only alternative to despair is that we assume, that we are unshakably convinced, that this garrison has either meanwhile been annihilated by the ten thousand, here, from

Oblonomenski Camp—there were trees burning in that direction!—or that they have come over to us, which is still more likely. With those four thousand of the surrendered Tashinsk garrison and the ten thousand Oblonomenski men, we shall be seventeen thousand, having to stand, by the day after tomorrow's 'sunrise,' here—here. At the river. If we don't we shall miss the eighty thousand we can count on from the camp cluster round Rabinsk, who can only move down this valley, which cannot take them longer than two days at most; and if they have the Rabinsk artillery—there was some far thunder in that direction!—we are a hundred thousand strong and astride the new highway and can strike straight down at Magadan."

He fumbled in his pocket, as if for a handkerchief; he had had none for many years; and dried his bony forehead with his bony hand. "Straight down at Magadan," he repeated, muttering.

And if there were already two hundred and fifty thousand rioting prisoners standing at Magadan? he thought. It was to be hoped that they had a few military men among them. Had it not been said once that the whole Soviet garrison of Harbin had been imprisoned at Magadan, because they were tainted by contact with the Japanese? Maybe there were some survivors. Morovsky, for instance. No, he had been liquidated, being tainted by contact with Tukhashevsky, having been with him as a youth at the Military Academy. Agarchenko, possibly. No, Agarchenko was said to have been shot in the mines; the gold mines, having sabotaged by not achieving the minimum labour norm. (Or was it the lead mines? Poisoned along with those three thousand Poles by lead?) Well, one must have officers to put discipline into the rabble, discipline.

He said aloud, "Citizen former Camp Commandant, what is your military rank?"

"Captain." Hing's eyes blinking.

Protogeroff said, "You are accepted. I make you a colonel."

"Next," said Yorkov, sharply.

Two men got up at the same time. One said, "Attona." The other at the same time uttered, scowling, "Yakut."

Yorkov asked, "Have you sabotaged the plane?"

"You first," said Ragoshin.

Yakut said—no, he said nothing. Scowling, lantern-jawed, he

opened his mouth and yelled, "Stalin! Cut to pieces the Stalinist Fascist beast Stalin to pieces cut." The yell was taken up by two, three.

"Accepted," Yorkov said.

Ragoshin nodded.

The Marshal said, "In charge of Field-Security." He was absent-minded. It was still the problem of discipline that worried him. He had been held to be a disciplinarian, once. A martinet. Trotsky. His wife. His son, too. They were dead. All of them. It was ludicrous, somehow, and running counter to the principles of good order, to stand here and be alive. Strike down at Magadan. Thence—ships? he thought. Maybe the Magadan rabble had at least seized the transports, if he was lucky. To Nikolajevsk, and deploy towards Khabarovsk, unless he preferred to sail right down into Vladivostok and— "Provided," he muttered, "the Americans have not landed yet."

He checked himself, with a start. There he was, standing by this table, looking down at a rag of shirt, and was still at Poshansk. (And if they landed? They were said to be allies now, were the Americans. Or had he mixed that up?) He had not enough officers. And his lines of supply? He had no supplies. He checked himself once more. Buoyancy, buoyancy. Youth. Was this not the day to be young? "I have made the Camp Commandant Borodin a colonel," he said with a harsh voice, the voice of a Marshal on the battlefield. (And supplies? Protogeroff of Tula! Protogeroff of Cherson! He had carried Revolution right across the Crimea without a single supply column to his name, only—how many years ago? Really thirty-five? But they did not count. What had they done to the Revolution? And he still living.

He straightened himself. "Borodin—colonel," he said aloud. "That one-eye—promoted to be lieutenant and my personal adjutant. What is your name, Citizen? Yakut?—Yakut, in charge of Field Security." (And what did they want supplies for, if there was no enemy? They would come over to them without firing a shot, and he could live on the land, once they struck farther South.) He exclaimed, "Next month in the Kremlin!" There were five, there were eleven voices in the hollowness of the room who took up the shout.

Toboggen started out of a pall of thoughts. He asked quietly, "Have they found the wrecked plane?"

They did not listen. The thin shout had been taken up by the guards and loafers at the door, and now it did a spindly-legged jump outside.

Yorkov said, "Next."

The next man said, "Attona."

Yorkov yelled at him, "Now speak up, you swine. Now confess, if you don't want to be shot in the neck. You sabotaged the plane."

"No," said Attona, firm and loud. "Why ask me? Why don't you ask Tretjak?"

There was a short silence. Then Yorkov asked very quietly, "Where is he?"

Attona said, "The Stalinist Fascist traitor and counter-revolutionary element Tretjak, fearing the just anger of the revolutionary proletariat, has gone underground, while I, who bore his company only with the greatest disgust and summoning my iron Marxist-Leninist discipline——"

Yorkov said, "Next."

Attona, unquenchable, went on, "—summoning my iron Marxist-Leninist discipline, first, mercilessly insisted on a subtle anti-Stalinist twist in the reception arrangements for the American party; second, arranged in the teeth of fierce opposition by the Citizen Camp Commandant——"

Borodin interrupted, shouting, "I stuck my head through Stalin's stomach."

Attona, high-pitched, his little mouth gymnasticking up and down, out-shouted him with the rattle and muzzle-velocity of a machine-gun, "—of fierce, of fierce opposition by the Camp Commandant, that the Citizen President of the Supreme Soviet on arrival from his outrageous exile be at once given dignified clothing and ample—ample refreshment. Furthermore, I cunningly prevented the removal of the historic maypole, whose glorious flame——"

He had to stop for a moment, to come up for air. Borodin, hind's-eyed and deeply hurt, seized the chance to butt in, howling, "I stuck my head, I stuck my head through Stalin's stomach, I stuck my head——"

Attona, reloaded, outshrieked him, "—whose glorious flame, as a merciless anti-Stalinist symbol—"

Toboggen had woken up to life. Disgust and suffering and sorrow, a wealth of sorrows, were in his face. Covering his ears with his emaciated hands, he roared, "Next. Next. Next."

The next man, pushed in front of the table by a soldier, was very old, oddly tall, of incredible frailty, with white locks falling down his temples into a thin white beard.

"Old Lalles, a cadger," said somebody. "He was found sleeping over in the hotel hall in a chair."

Yorkov said, "Your paper. *Propusk*."

The old man said, "I have been saved!"

Someone said, "Lead him back. Let him sleep."

In the street outside they were still shouting.

CHAPTER XXXII

IN the street outside they were still shouting.

After his abortive interview with the Protestant, the priest Calv had hastened home. None of his herd had followed his summons to the chapel—none. He had lied when he told the pastor that they were downstairs. After an hour of prayer, he decided to set out once more. If God willed it, this was to be the night of his death; but he would stand up and fight. Revolution, Counter-Revolution, the Protestant—to him it was all one. As he reached Stalin Boulevard and the outer rim of the crowd that had meanwhile assembled, a white glow of anger was in him. Deserted, he said in his heart; deserted, I lied when I said to the heathen that there were thirty-one, and when I said in my prayer to yourself, my Lord Jesus Christ, that there were twenty-nine I was still lying. The true figure is nil. Yes, my Lord Jesus, I am alone.

From the house of his sheep, the tailor, which was locked to his knocking, he had seen a brass band here in the centre of this crowd, and his lost sheep, the tailor, a brass bandsman in the Polyhymnia. It was with the faithless tailor in his mind that Father Calv started elbowing his way centrewards.

He looked straight in front of him. There were some shouts of protest when they felt his elbow in their ribs, but those were all men force-settled in the district; when they turned and recognized him, they stepped aside to let him pass. He reached the crowd's centre and the brass band quickly. What looked like his lost sheep's bugle was hung up on a music-stand in front of a deserted chair; the tailor had spotted him and ducked away in time behind the fat citizen who played the drum.

Calv looked about, with burning eyes. Had there been some tittering? Were they tittering at his garb, the garb of the Lord's own Holy Church? With a wild, sweeping gesture he upset the empty chair and the music-stand (and had not a Greater One thus upset the tables of the moneylenders?) The maltreated bugle danced away along the boulevard, with a metallic moan of protest against the outrage.

Gorbakov, manager of the Staprodisc, collected it. Red with anger, he stepped up to the priest and said, "Counter-revolutionary impudence."

Calv, erect, said, "This is not your concern, Citizen former Party Secretary. But it is not for the first time that you interfere with my licensed activity."

Gorbakov said very loudly, "It won't be for the last time. I warn you. Reactionary Fascist priests and God-propagandist agents daring to lift their heads: has it come to that? I warn you in my double capacity as undeposed musical culturist—and I am still the Party authority anyway, pending new elections. This bugle—isn't that so, Citizens?—is the property of the people. You'll be made to pay."

Calv said, "Are you sneering at my poverty? I shall pay if something is to be paid. But"—he raised his voice—"but I ask you in front of this community of witnesses——"

"Don't shout," the deposed functionary shouted rudely. "This is a last warning. You will be dealt with."

Calv, whitefaced, trembling, sonorous like a preacher, for all to hear, exclaimed, "I ask you in front of this community of witnesses: for whom the music; who pays you and calls the tune? Do you propose to worship the hand still dripping with the blood of——?"

He stopped. He let Gorbakov stand where he stood and went across with long strides to the entrance of the hotel. He had seen the young American. The young man had been pointed out to him. Son of the father with whom contact ought to be established—to tell the world. Standing there with a woman. And the young man a virgin, a bachelor, as Calv had been informed. So the woman he was standing about with unaccompanied in the dead of night could not be his wife. Could she be his——? Ah, it was probably not politic to go into the question, considering the desired friendly relations with—but who would dare suggest that God's priest be politic on the day of his martyrdom?

"Is this woman your mother, then?" he said sternly, stepping up to Mr. Asa P. Watkins, who stood there in Citizeness Borodina's company.

"Oh," said the woman. She had dressed carefully and come down, a lady. Her motives in doing so were a tactfully balanced edifice; built of the brick of loyalty to him whose name she bore

and who was in there in the Cultinst battling for his rehabilitation by the new authorities; and of the mortar of deep emotion going out towards the vicissitudes of fate of this young, lonely foreigner; an edifice of dramatic proportions of noble self-denial; and showing only in the remotest attic window a tiny flag of charmingly discreet and yet ravishingly girlish, though class-consciously proletarian, curiosity. And she had been discussing the said equilibrium with the young stranger, standing, intimate but refined, close to him, bosom to bosom as it were, and now—“Oh,” she said, and lifted her plucked hand to her shocked mouth. (His mother!) There were even some people laughing.

Some shout or slogan, jumping out of the assembly hall of the Cultinst. And Father Calv, unovercoated and unfed, was just then swaying. And here, my Lord God, am I swaying of weakness, and this is my defeat. They led him away by then, out of the orbit of the lanterns.

The tailor had returned to his seat. They were all ready to strike up a tune; they were just waiting for someone to give the signal, or make a speech.

(The young man, trembling—and here was his stammer again, but never mind all the stammering in the whole world, it must come out—the young man said, hoarsely, “M-may I call you Mi-mi-mi—c-call you M-minerva?”)

A shout jumped out of the Cultinst, highly patriotic, or else very Socialist.)

It happened, at that moment. The brass band ready, all set to strike up. Outside the hotel, across the boulevard, another group of people had gathered on the parapet, at the back of the crowd; no one took any notice of their gathering. It was a gaggle of Protestants, Wolga German force-settlers in the district, earnest young men and many virgins. And, a moment before the proletarian Polyhymnia struck up, with a serenade in honour of the new authority, the Herr Protestant Pastor, his carp eaten, came down from his room and, having gathered his gaggle, lifted his arms conductorially. They had rushlights, they peered, youthfully pimply-faced and earnestly bespectacled, over each other's shoulders into sparse, haphazardly gathered sheets of music. The song they sang, shakily, to the accompaniment of a single violin, was the Internationale.

It was not until some minutes later that, the song over, the Herr Pastor climbed up on to the parapet. In his wide carrying stentorian voice, he addressed, across the boulevard, the authorities in the Cultinst, wishing them God-speed in their just and wise deliberations. And, he said resoundingly, it pleaseth the Lord to support Authority, and was not His Son Himself such a one as would stand by the side of what a modern churchman like the present speaker, in the way of humble folk, would call the Underdog?

It was then that the bomb was thrown.

It was a stink-bomb. Where it came from, no one was ever sure. This much was certain, that Father Calv could not have produced it; not in so short a time. It was said later that the bomb must have contained something less jocular, for when it exploded before the feet of the pastor while he made his speech, it ate away the better part of his trousers below the knees; which was the reason of his retreat. That content of acid formed the basis later of the suggestion that this was not a stink-bomb really but an explosive weapon developed for close fighting by the Red Army—carelessly stored, and in consequence decomposed and rendered ineffective but for the stink.

There was an ugly scene. Gangs of men in camp garb drifted in; men of a different complexion. They were not Kontriks; they were Anti-Social Elements: murderers, rapers, thieves. They drifted in, and looked round amused, with slow eyes.

A shout, a slogan, jumped out of the entrance of the Cultinst, and was revolutionary.

CHAPTER XXXIII

(" . . . c-call you Minerva?")

"Huh, it is dark in here," said the Citizeness Cultural Propagator Borodina. "Have they not put in a candle? If you have matches, we can light it. Do not close the door. Why do you close the door?"

Mr. Asa P. Watkins said, "N-no light because—the cut. There will be enough light once we-we-we——"

She stood there and was much too large for the little room. She looked about with dignity. "Very plain," she said. "The hotel organizer ought not to have taken your American living conditions as a basis. He ought to have allotted you a better room." She looked about. "Is that where you are supposed to sleep, over there? Is it not hard?"

"T-try." (Boldly insinuating. Quick at repartee.)

She tried it, with her behind, majestically, and got up again at once. (And oh, the spot where she had been sitting. A spot to dream on. The impression to be preserved.)

"Young female American citizens' pictures?" she said, having stepped closely to his opened suitcase. There was now some disembodied light coming in from the street, some people with bundles and with a lantern, feeling unsafe maybe in an outlying house, seemed intent on sheltering in the hotel; the shadow of the window cross walked over the far-side wall. There were more such lanterns now, sending their light up to the room from very far; it was like dehydrated moonshine. The citizeness, looking more closely at the pictures, corrected herself, "Not young females but men? Your friends from your youth organization or army unit? And you do not collect any female pictures—what do you call them?"

"Pipipi," he said, "pin-up-girls? No."

"No picture of your sweetheart?"

The answer would have been intricate. He shook his head violently.

She gave him a slight, flatteringly unbelieving slap. There, now

she had again got hold of his hand. She squeezed it, for one paralysing second, and let go again, and said, "Well, that is that. I promised to inspect your room, and I did. It is a Soviet principle to keep a promise. Now we may go out again." She added, "I promised it as a sign of my gratitude for your undertaking to protect my husband. He got himself into a bad situation, owing to weakness in face of drink. Let us go again," she repeated, and sat down on his Spartan bed,

He said, "You mistrust me, M-m——?" (Minerva. He ought to have called her Juno. Juno, Juno, Juno. Easy as buyer. Or the Statue of Liberty.) He whispered, "Don't be afraid. To me, your chastity's sacred like a virgin. Married or not married, to me you are a vivi——" He announced, too loud, "I ignore your marriage. Virginal underneath, that is what you are, to my moral principles, Mi—Juno."

"Thank you," she said, groping to squeeze his hand and not finding it. (Juno?) He was sitting next to her on the Spartan bed. (Virginal. Too true.) She said, quiet and bitter, "Ignore, yes. There are some other citizens who ignore it."

(Who? He? Ignore what? Their marriage? He! A staggering vista of depravity never expected in a Soviet citizen opened before his eyes. The Commandant a libertine, ignoring the sacredness, the breathtaking bliss, the shattering honour of—— Ah, and the almost annihilating intimacy of her confidence!) He said aloud, "There is nothing baser than fornication, by a married man and a Socialist."

She was somewhat puzzled, for a moment. Then she laughed lightly, "Borodin?" She added cautiously, "He is not as ardent as—— some." She looked away, and went on, in a voice scarcely able to hide her ravished pride of a metropolitan citizeness from Vladivostok, and yet matter-of-fact enough, "He doesn't take any interest in me. In no way."

(Shattering! The breathtaking intimacy of the——!) It was he who dared grope this time for her hand that lay there limply on her substantial knee. He whispered, "Juno."

Her lips were set. She said, ruthless, "In fact, he could not if he wished." And went on, a moment later, in a different voice, "Now, now, now, be good, Citizen, or else——" She patted his hand with firm little slaps as if she were preparing it for the grill; she patted the

hand that had in no way approached her, and gave it a little fling-away, in a defence against no attack, and said, "I shall leave this moment if you are not a gentleman."

He was marshalling his linguistic faculties so as to say on his Socialist oath that never in his dreams—but she cut it short. She said, "That is what you can do with your Ursula, or whatever her name is—your father's interpreter."

"Never!"

"Don't tell me. Such an ardent young bull like you. Has she been in here? You nearly confessed it—do you think I did not notice? Now, come clean, Citizen."

He said, "My most solemn—you know I am a Socialist. My Socialist word of honour. I abhor—I abhor——"

"I do not believe it," she said. "You men. None of you abhor women who are like boards."

But he was not to be deflected. He said, "I abhor Monopolo-Capitalist pro-promis-p-p. Monopolcacap—promiscuity."

She groped for his hand. He could not have said how it came about that they were lying across the too Spartan bed. The situation was highly uncomfortable. He lost himself like Little Red Riding Hood in the wide wild woods. And whether you looked to the right or to the left and whether you looked ahead of you, there was no end of it. It was like using a hammer on a pound of butter. And: ah, her breath was short, and ah, she must titter all the time, and ah, why do you leave me? And ah, she said, and had lain there motionless like a goddess apart from her tittering; and now this was her first word aloud, "What will you now think of me, Citizen?" And ah, why had he left her? "Oh you," she said, "oh you bull."—"Oh you," she said, ambling again through the room. She shook herself like a large hen, and was again smooth all over, and you can look again, and standing in front of the pictures, she said, "This one has bow-legs. The left leg, look."

He said, his stammer gone, "He has no bow-legs." (It was the Pirate.)

She said, "But for my gratefulness for your promise to protect my husband, this would not have happened."

He said, "I respect you for it."

Ah, and his stammer gone, she thought, and his stammer gone.

She said, "It was just once, Citizen as a reward. Because you looked so starved and lonely."

(Not very tactful.) He said sternly, All the same, you ought not to do such a thing, Citizen."

She said, "Now you think wrongly, Citizen. I thought you felt that it was—you said you felt it. It was the first time."

"I felt it, and I said I respect you," he said didactically. "That's why I open your eyes, Citizen. You would not be so safe with others as you are with me. All sorts of dangers."

"You with your Socialist principles." She laughed, not friendly.

"My Socialism is not under discussion," he said. "You mean I offended against it, committing fornication with you. But at the same time I repented."

"Oh, that's why," she said.

"That's why what?"

"Nothing."

He said, "I repented all the time, and I shall say so back home, in Socialist self-criticism. Without mentioning your name. I suppose you will do that too."

"No, thank you," she said. She put on her gloves.

He said, "Just keep looking inside your conscience, Citizen, then maybe you will do it. It is marvellous. It will make you see the Socialist sacredness of marriage."

"Open the door," said the woman.

Asa P. Watkins said, "Regarding my previous remarks about your chast-chast—your cha-chastity——" He had unlocked the door.

The Citizeness Cultural Propagator Borodina walked out majestically and did not turn her head.

CHAPTER XXXIV

"*Schrecklich*, Pastor," she said. "Simply burnt away, all there was of the trousers from the knee down."

"Never mind the trousers, Adele," he said. "The wounds! You might put some disinfectant on them. There must be some in the bag."

"It's just scratches, Pastor," she said. "I am furious about the trousers. I was hoping we might at least cut them and have shorts for you to hike in, but—look. All the way up. An outrage."

He said, "It *was* an outrage. These are not scratches, incidentally. These are wounds. It was a close shave. A few inches higher up—sensitive organs might have been hurt."

"I can patch up *this* rent with a few stitches, anyway. Just wait a moment; don't move."

"Maybe they *have* been hurt. You don't realize the danger, Adele. It was touch and go. But I—Schimmelpfennig said: heroic. I should not put it that high, but—I was pretty calm, I believe."

"I can't do it this way. You jump about too much. You must let me have the trousers. Yes, pull them off. Come into the room. Heroic? I'm sure you were heroic, Pastor; you are too modest. That's better, I shan't be a minute."

"Why do you titter, Adele?"

"I—no."

"Yes, yes. What is it? Surely, my standing here in my pantaloons while you——"

"You look so *sweet*. If you must know."

"Adele, Adèle. You astonish me. Improper thoughts?"

"I am sorry, Pastor. It was just—— One can't have improper thoughts in matrimony, surely? You taught me that Martin Luther himself——"

"That referred to special questions, Adele. A healthy and hearty matrimonial life, as I trust ours is——"

"Quite. Yes. I apologized, didn't I? It's just—when did I ever see you in *pants*, Pastor? When did I *see* you in pants? It's just—the light, probably. Did Martin Luther say anything about——"

"About what?"

"Oh, never mind. Look, it's nearly ready."

"About what, Adele?"

"Did he say anything about putting out the light?"

"Adele! You astonish me."

"Yes, Pastor. I am sorry."

"As I said—heroic. But I just answered, No, my dear Schimmelpfennig, maybe I kept pretty calm, that's all.—With the burning tatters of my trousers lying smouldering about my boots. Fräulein Nachtigall remarked, pretty well to the point——"

"Here. All that's missing is the other button on the pants. I can put it on while you——"

"She remarked, if the Catholics stoop to *such* methods of plain terror——"

"Oh."

"What?"

"You *did* get scratched. Wounded, I mean. Look."

"Adele!"

"I'm—sorry. I'm—ah, but, Pastor, this isn't—Pastor! No, no. The light. The door isn't even locked. Oh, you."

"My dear Adele, why are you so——?"

"I'm so—flabbergasted. It isn't at all like you. It isn't the eve of Sabbath, is it? You little piglet."

"Don't be vulgar, Adele."

"You little piglet, you little piglet, oh, you little——"

"Don't——"

"Ha."

"What?"

"Just because I am the only person in the whole Soviet Union who would call you a little piglet and——"

"Stop, please."

"And not on the eve of Sabbath either. 'Heroic!' You little——"

"I mean it, Adele. As for heroic, I mentioned, didn't I, that it was myself who protested against the term. Calm—did I mention it, or didn't I? As for the eve of Sabbath, if you *must* keep referring to—— It is in poor taste. Luther's is not an injunction but a recommendation. There can always be overriding considerations; such

as—I repeat, please don't laugh. Don't giggle. Did it ever occur to you that—thanksgiving—could be such an overriding——?”

“Thank—I'm so sorry, Pastor, I really don't want to—look, I can't help it. Thank—ha. Thankgiv—haha, I swear it s—look, I'm crying really, it's my nerves. Thanksgiving?”

“You seem to forget that I was very nearly grievously wounded. Is the button fixed? I shall thank you, my dear Adele, if you will now reach me my trousers.”

“I am sorry, Pas—I am so sorry, Pastor, I am so sorry. I shall never, never again, never—and I am thankful to our Lord, too, of course.”

“Sometimes I ask myself—here, ah, I am afraid you will have to fix the lower button as well some time soon, Adcle, as soon as we get home; it is pretty loose—sometimes, Adcle, I ask myself what attracts me to you. Is it your modesty, your chastity, your good cooking—though the carp was a little over-peppered; I mention that only incidentally—I repeat, is it any of that? No. It is your stupidity.”

“Pastor——”

“Is it really beyond your intellectual grasp to imagine that by thanksgiving I do not simply mean—what you meant? Adcle! If we ever have a son, he shall be called Joseph.”

“Because he would be the youngest? Joseph in Egypt——”

“Because the Lord enjoined us to be loyal to Caesar. Why did that unfortunate Catholic rave against me? Why was I nearly martyred tonight? It is the great strength of our Church that it marches with the times. That man in Moscow: you may have some mental reservations, but—a great man, Adele. The Lord willing, our son shall be called after him; provided of course he is still in power at the time a name must be registered; which is doubtful, I admit. One might have to change. Now let's go down. We might have a nip of something strengthening. That carp of yours was highly over-peppered, my dear Adcle.”

“Now stop harping on my carp, Pastor. You taste pepper everywhere. You must be ill. An uncle of mine back by the Wolga kept tasting pepper—six months later he was in his grave.”

“How can you, Adele, at this moment—a momentous moment, possibly—how can you think of——”

“And you and the carp? And the door not locked. How would you have liked it if the citizen hotel organizer had come in—or that fat daughter of his you are looking at all the time? How can I think of——! You know what I thought of, all the time? You didn’t even lock the door!”

CHAPTER XXV

"THE information you offer us," said Ragoshin, "is no information. Your statement that no Americans have in fact landed or are likely to land is appreciated, but no one ever believed that anyway."

Mr. Robert Connecticut Smith said, "I look at the street outside. There is not a man in that street who doesn't believe the Americans are on your side."

"Have landed, you said a minute ago," Ragoshin said, a half-empty sack of yellowness but expanding a little as he sat there, two elbows on the table. He looked sideways at Yorkov, who sat there toothless, fingerless, with a dead man's face that was motionless but for his eyes; yes, his small eyes had woken up and glittered, coldly amused. He said nothing.

Smith said, "Where is that other citizen, Toboggen?"

Ragoshin said, "You won't sell him this information either. It was decided to let the common citizen in the street believe what he likes best to believe, to fortify himself for the struggle. If it fortifies him to believe in America, let him believe in America. The Comrade Public Prosecutor here, or myself, have no illusions. Nor has Marshal Protogeroff, I am sure. He is inspecting troops. As for the Comrade President of the Supreme Soviet, I repeat that he won't buy this from you either. He is resting, over there to the left, in the little room."

There was a short silence. Over there to the right, in the assembly hall, the scrutiny of declarations of allegiance was still in progress; having made his own declaration Comrade Attona saw to that. "—and so I accuse myself," a citizen's voice was just saying, "of not having been watchful enough, as I ought to have been as a class-conscious proletarian, to unmask the snares of the Stalinist Fascist beast; which mistake, however, if my deviation is forgiven me, I shall make up for by mercilessly bettering my education with an unceasing proletarian watchfulness."

It floated over from the assembly hall to the small conference chamber, where they sat in a little silence, savouring the sound. Then the Citizen Public Prosecutor, at one time nicknamed Ivan

the Terrible, said, toothless, with an oddly croaking voice, with cold amusement glittering in his little eyes, "And Watkins did not send you? Are you asking us to believe that it is really your own little action of private enterprise to come here and sell your boss?" Ah, his English was fluent and highly idiomatic, he had at one time grilled every single engineer of the Metro-Vickers plant.

Smith said angrily, "I am selling no one." How did the question come in whether or not he might decide to jump off Walter M. Watkins's band waggon? In fact he had not yet made up his mind. Was it not natural for a man to look round if there happened to be a job going in these exotic parts? It did not mean that he believed in their revolution! The mere thought of it was an offence. And it was just like them to attach moralist implications to a straight commercial proposition. They were not civilized. He ought to have known. Angry, he went on, "If you want to unmask something, in the idiom of you guys, you are in for a disappointment. There is nothing to unmask. I have an idea there is a job I can do for you folks, and that is all there is to it. You tell me you knew there was nothing in the American landings, but you let your crowd believe in it. Not so highly moral of you either, probably, but pretty smart. Now here is something you won't tell me you knew. After his last conversation with that citizen, Bebitz—where is he, incidentally?"

There was a short silence. Then Yorkov said quietly, "Under arrest." There was a short silence.

Smith said: "After his conversation with Bebitz, Walter M. Watkins undressed, took a drug, and went to sleep at once. A tired man wants a rest, on a night like this."

Ragoshin said carefully, "Meaning that he does not know——?"

"That he knows nothing," Smith said resolutely. "He knows nothing about the change here—I mean, Stalinist Fascist and all that. Incidentally, none of us knew about any camps. They kept it from us. Pretty smart. I know now. He doesn't."

Yorkov asked, without raising his voice, "A threat. Against whom?"

"Oh, stop it," Smith said rudely. "I am stating facts. What I say is that as long as Watkins doesn't know of any change—and of any camps—you might still get him to work the loan for you. He dropped the idea. But does he know his mind? How are you going

to stand on your feet without a loan? You want a loan. What about your Soviet patriotism and all that? Make him work a loan. A private loan. Just Watkins and his friends."

There was a short silence. Ragoshin asked, "Can he do that?" There was a short silence.

Smith said, "If I can operate."

Yorkov, amused, asked, "That is the job you have in mind?"

Smith said, "That is the job."

Ragoshin asked, "Regarding the—mishap—to the small aircraft flown by the daughter of the Citizen President Tobeggen——"

"There will be a criminal prosecution," Yorkov interjected casually.

"Of course," said Ragoshin. "Now, regarding that, does Mr. Watkins know of the mishap?"

"Has she been found?" Smith asked.

Ragoshin said, "Crashed in the sea, it is thought. It can take weeks before a corpse floats and is carried to the shore. To a shore almost without inhabitants."

Yorkov said, "I repeat, does Watkins know of the mishap?"

Smith said harshly, "He doesn't even know she ever went off. If you wake him up now——" He did not continue.

Yorkov said, "He would believe that she is alive, and about?"

"Alive and about," said Smith.

There was a short silence.

(From the assembly hall, a voice floated over, "And as for my having mended the portrait of the Fascist Stalin with sticking plaster, the allegation that I did that so as to ingratiate myself with Stalinist Fascist superiors is a stinking lie. The truth is that I offered to mend it only so as to have an excuse to remove it from its place, and if the picture had not been burned meanwhile, it would be clearly visible that I used the sticking plaster as an instrument of my anti-Stalinist-Fascist initiative, by means of which his features were distorted to a diabolical Fascist grin.")

They sat there in a little silence, savouring the sound.

Ragoshin said lightly, "Assuming we employ you—what would you suggest?" He added, "Always assuming that we really care for an American loan."

Smith said quickly: "Rig this up the democratic way. Start a publicity campaign in the United States."

"Publicity campaign?" asked Ragoshin.

Smith fumbled in his pockets. He must land this job or never. "Here," he said. "I drafted the slogan. Here." He read out, "'If the President of the United States of America refuses co-operation in World Peace and forces the private citizen to supply the means—is he merely kidding the American Constitution, or is he kidding YOU? Sign the Loan, for He Who Kicks Last Kids Best.'"

He finished, shouting.

"Impressive," said Ragoshin, after a short silence. He added, "Showing a considerable degree of originality."

Smith mopped his brow. He said, "You'll have to pay cash in advance."

Outside in the street, there were running feet. Someone shouted, "Help!"

They had found a woman, down in the railway shed. First she looked as if she had just fallen under the tram; skirt torn off and all; and hell, just look at her breasts, look at the marks she has all over. But then, if twenty really had been having their bit of fun with her, they wouldn't have left her the trinkets she still had on her fingers; look at this one, it looks like an engagement ring. Must have been just one, or just two, who caught up with her.

She was dead. There was no blood, though. But she was dead.

"Help!" somebody called out. Feet running.

CHAPTER XXXVI

"HUN," said Elsie, up in the room. "How did you—? Howdy, howdy. How did you two get in? Giving me the haha. The creeps."

"Door wasn't locked," said the speaking Schwankov alias Schwanneke. "Just passing outside, thought we'd look in and ask the time."

"Your faces," she said. "Like a haha. Like a cheese, that's what those pans of yours look like. You oughtn't to have forgotten them bottles here. Is that vod—vodod—? You know what I mean. Your pan looks like vomit."

He said, "The exact time, that's all I want to know."

She said, "Wanda isn't in. Cross my heart. You can look—there, is she hid under my skirt? No, just look. Is she hid under my skirt? She isn't. She isn't hid anywhere, you can look."

He said, "The time!"

She said, "Don't haha, don't shout, see? You can go see there's an alarm clock on the whatsitsname. On the—hi, what're you doing to that clock?"

He said, from the far corner, "It's five minutes to three."

"It's—" she said. "It was gone three-thirty last time I looked."

"It's five to three," he said, coming over carrying the clock. "Look."

"I don't care," she said. "Five to three, three to five, I don't bloody care. That is vodka. I can tell from the—don't shout at me, all right, five to three. It's gone half-past four, really. If you spoiled the clock Wanda'll bite your head off. It's her clock. She doesn't like you, anyway. Now—okay, five to three, just cool down, come here, sit by my—you're such a baby, Bubi, such a—but send out the other one, I say, send him out. You can sit on my lap if you like because you're such a—and your face like vomit. Go all over the place, look, she isn't in, hasn't been in since—maybe you seen her outside? Now don't shout at me; all right, if you haven't you haven't; come, I'll show you round; she isn't there; come, but I say, send the other one out; I don't like his pan."

He said, "I was looking for her here, that's why I came in. I

thought five to three she must be home, I thought." On the steep narrow stairs, going up behind her close, her buttocks almost against his face.

She said, "That's her room; look, I showed you before, didn't I; you can look under her bed; go look maybe she's in her bed hid under the rugs; sometimes she hides; the apparatchik looking for her and—look, no one. That's where they had their fun, the apparatchik and she; they made such a racket that—haha. Just a little push, so why do you—just my joke giving you a little push. If you could see your pan sitting there in her bed, baby. What's giving you the jitters? Her smell? Say, what about that money you said you got. Was a lie, wasn't it? I bet it was. Let me see it. Let me—ai, that slippery rush mat, I was just stumbling. Oh, you are a little—In her bed, too. Ah, you are a devil. You needn't be sorry it isn't her, anyway. I don't want to say nothing, she being my friend, but way back where I knew her in Rumania at the theatre she had a fiancé he had the pox, but it's always possible she didn't get it, isn't it possible? I don't want to say nothing against a friend, it's against my—now, now. Don't get nervy, why do you get nervy, you haven't been with her, so why—? Oh, now, why do you—oh, you poor, oh, you poor baby Bubi, it'll be all right again in a minute. Do you love poor li'l Elsie a teeny weeny li'l bit if she—hi, say, how come you smell of Wanda's scent? How did you get by—ai. Swine. Who do you think you are, hit me in the face? Hit a lady in the face while she—have you no education? Me, just remarking how come you smell of Wanda and—ai. Apologize or else—ai. What? The money? What do I know of your—I'm not interested in any—ai, ai, all right, take it back; I just tossed it over there as a joke, just as a lesson; next time be careful; it was a joke, and anyway what are you going to give poor li'l—ai, all right, if you don't you don't, only—ai, don't squeeze me like this or—ai. If you squeeze me—Help. Now—I'll be brown and blue all over. Now this is no joke, in a second I'll cry for help and—ai, help. There's three men sleeping next door and the wall thin, they'll hear me if I—help! You're breaking my—help, ai, help, ai, help, ai, help. Keep your—ah, let me breathe. Keep your hands off my throat. I say, I beg of you keep your hands off; you're choking me. I say—what? The time? You came in five to three. Five minutes to three, yes,

but, put the clock right, Bubi, or else they'll find a difference. I swear by Almighty God it was five to three. I swear—what? Smell of Wanda? I never said you smelled of Wanda; how shouldn't everything smell of Wanda considering it's her bed? I was just joking, I never said you smelled of her. I never—ah, Bubi, ever, yes, ever, forever."

The deaf-mute, outside.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE above incidents, chosen for their colour, and for their smell, as is the way with chroniclers, might be thought to be unrepresentative of the great majority of the nameless, of those who did not leave their outlying homes to shelter in the hotel and other central buildings of Poshansk, or to add to the throng in Stalin Boulevard, or to elbow into the assembly hall to register their allegiance to the new powers. Yes, there was the multitude of the stay-at-homes, the invisible, standing behind bolted doors, listening behind shuttered windows, trembling, alarmed, bewildered; well, and some of them even sleeping and maybe blissfully unaware of the great change—hope or threat, whichever the case might be—that would affect their lives.

The great machine, fed with the fuel of human misery, had made the township of Poshansk, and its district, and another thousand districts of that North-Eastern sub-continent, quite unlike other towns and districts of the vast Soviet Union, let alone of the world at large. There is no civic administration; on Soviet maps you would find those vast tracts described as "Administered by the Ministry of the Interior"; no town soviet is in charge, there are only commandants installed by the Ministry—camp commandants, town commandants, a commandant to each little cluster of force-settlers' cabins; and of course a commandant of the hotel—apparatchiks upon apparatchiks and narks upon narks of many varieties, bossing it over and perpetually informing on a medley of the oppressed—members of many nations on whose soil the Soviet soldier's foot had trod; Poles by the million; Polish Jews; those from the Balut; half-hearted allies from Hungary and Rumania, like the two hapless women, one of whom had been called Wanda Miranda in her time and was now a ravaged corpse; and prisoners-of-war of especial merit like the man Schwanneke; and Cossaks; and those Germans force-settled along the Volga two hundred years ago and now force-settled once again (never losing their identity, pastor or priest, and never forgetting their ancient feuds)—and united, all of

them, only in one great emotion: in their hatred for their jailers, and in their fear.

It was at this point that Marshal Protogeroff started the counting of heads—and made his mistake. Those on whom Toboggen and his three apostles could really rely were the politicals. They were marked out for slow death, they really had nothing to lose but their chains; Kontriks; Kontriks of the Left. For those of the Right, Tsarists, Monarchists, rich men, “bourgeois” and Whites of Revolution days, had long since died. Kontriks of the Left, then, who more often than not had been, at the time of their arrests, truer Communists than their arresters, and were still Communists—but for that hatred. Ah, what had Stalin done to their Revolution? They would go back to the beginning, and start all over again.

They were the élite, as far as they were still alive, having survived in the teeth of the statistics—freaks, exceptions that proved the rule. How many could there be? Put the figure of true Communist believers in the vast Union as high as ten per cent, and assume that half of them are put into jail or camp by the other half (and that wastage in slave labour and misery is equalled by new arrests): even on that generous if crude reckoning this would account for five true followers among a hundred. Another seventy in those hundred would be men or women without political opinions, serving a five years’ term for an incautious remark, a disrespectful joke, slackness at work, prostitution, petty theft. Or take those arrested upon liberation in that Baltic country that had been Toboggen’s and Bebitz’s fatherland.

The order, dated 28th November, 1940, signed by one Gusicvitiis, People’s Commissar of the Interior, bearing the number 0054, Secret — “Secret,” ordered the following to be registered for deportation: “All members of Russian pre-revolutionary parties; of contemporary Baltic parties; of students’ organizations, of the state police, gendarmerie and the prison staffs; Tsarist officers, and all officers and military judges of contemporary Polish and Baltic armies; volunteers of all armies other than the Bolshevik; ex-Communists, and all sorts of refugees and political émigrés; contraband runners; all citizens of foreign states and representatives of foreign firms; officials of ministries; the staff of the Red Cross; aristocrats, landowners, merchants, bankers, industrialists and hotel and

restaurant proprietors; persons active in parishes, clergymen, secretaries and active members of religious communities; and finally all persons who are in contact with foreign states, all those who have travelled abroad, and those who speak Esperanto or collect stamps."

. In that small country, they amounted to seven hundred thousand out of a total of three millions. In Poland, there were additionally included forestry officials, members of certain skilled trades, all families of all soldiers of all ranks who served abroad, and of those who were interned abroad; furthermore, all refugees from the German-occupied part of Poland; and every person who had attended university.

Those, all together, making up seventy out of a hundred prisoners liberated from Poshansk camp or force-settled about the town, were of course uncertain customers, looked at from where Marshal Protogeroff stood. He could only rely on their enmity towards the Stalin system; he could not rely on their fidelity towards his flag. They would co-operate as long as that flag was flying high; fellow-travellers with mental reservations, until further notice; at the first setback they would desert. And those time-servers—Attona, Yakut, Borodin—who along with two score other functionaries registered their allegiance to the new revolution, belonged to the same category of reliability in success, of unreliability should some difficulty be encountered now, or in five days at Magadan, or in fifteen at Khabarovsk. (Though again there were differences between those three: Yakut, a member of an all but extinct and temporarily pampered tribe, was governed by an unbounded ambition all his own, in face of which lip service to Stalin meant as little as lip service to any other man. Borodin had for all practical intents already lost his scalp when it all happened; if he gambled high, it was with a stake that on close inspection no longer was his own. The only time-server—dyed in the wool, unadulterated, and unashamed—was Attona.)

Five per cent, plus seventy. The remaining quarter were criminals. Not petty thieves with a chance to get back into the community; whether they were robbers, rapers, murderers when they were condemned, or small fry only later corrupted by life in camp—they were men who had reached the point of no return.

If they felt themselves outcasts upon conviction, that feeling of inferiority had long since been turned upside down: locked up along with the politicals they had soon noticed that they were better workers receiving higher rations; stouter survivors, infinitely more eligible for promotion to the rank of overseers and leaders of hutments and works brigades, and altogether physically, morally, politically, vastly more desirable to the authorities than those bespectacled wretches who were guilty of some incomprehensible mental filth called counter-revolution (probably a sort of intellectual bestialism or sodomy no clean-living murderer would have truck with); who could not use a spade; who died like flies; and the very fellows who in liberty had fancied themselves superior to a decent highwayman. In camp they could be made to pay; beaten up; locked out or left behind in the Arctic frost; robbed of their rations; driven to exhaustion and death at work; their womenfolk ravaged whenever there was an opportunity; all of which was amicably ignored or idly observed by the jailers. It was these men with their scale of values thrown out of gear, crime seasoned with megalomania, ready to run amuck, who made up the last quarter among the camp men, and who were the real danger to Protogroff's reckoning.

Accordingly, by the time dawn broke, the river of events had split into diverging branches—as a river would, not far from its final sea.

There were the ghosts, rejoicing; merry-making in a spectral way; skeletons clad in rags, toothlessly laughing; eyelessly looking into the bright future; fleshlessly, chestlessly, strutting and marching to and fro at the commands and voiceless shouts of an equally dematerialized N.C.O. or officer; carrying rifles all but as heavy as themselves; pasting up hand-written placards, ukases, orders, rules, regulations improvised in a minute if not thought out over years of lonely brooding, sleepless, shivering, kept awake by vermin, by the cold, by the death-moan next door; regulations regarding elections of committees, requisitioning, distribution and control of stores; there were twenty-one regulations pasted up within two hours.

A whole regiment of ghosts, with eyes shining, marched out into the fading night, to man strategic points, to secure the railway

line, to reconnoitre North, South, East, West; and a patrol—ah, three patrols went out to take up contact with other camps; and a gang of experts—ah, a professor of physics!—repaired the cut cable (though there was no current in it—there must be some more revolutionary cable-cutters farther down the line). And yet another patrol went out with orders to strike across the marshes towards the sea, to look for the wreckage of a certain aircraft; but even this sad errand was ennobled and made gay by being an errand in liberty.

And those who did not thus busy themselves for the sake of a new society—we shall begin at the beginning!—were standing about smiling, or walking a little this way and that, and a few had reached the lounge of the hotel and stretched out on the floor to sleep there like lords, like people's commissars, and three score—ah, six score—were holding hands and dancing a little round a small fire in the centre of October Revolution Square, stumbling a little with weakness, and twittering.

For the activities of the other branch of that same river, the discovery in the station shed of the raped woman's body worked like a signal. The robbery with violence in Marxengels Lane followed almost immediately afterwards, and what happened next were three cases of arson. Also, there were, as turned out later, seven cases of rape, one of them a child of eleven, one a woman of sixty-eight. The Staprodisc store, already requisitioned, went up in flames an hour and sixteen minutes later.

An hour and forty-three minutes later, a former Ministry Specialist by the name of Tretjak, having hidden in the disused pantry of an official building, chanced into the open, presumably to find ways and means of escape. He had not gone to the assembly hall to change his allegiance, either because he feared not to be accepted, having been too high up to escape responsibility for certain stern measures of his department against prisoners; or because in contrast to some of his subordinates he was just too slow a man to change. Also, if he was to flee, the fading night was his last opportunity.

He was recognized and caught—without dignity, after a short chase along Stalin Boulevard, in which the stocky functionary stood no chance. He fell, and rose bespattered, and requested to be brought

before the new authority. That was greeted with laughter, and one of his captors stepped forward and applied a slight, playful slap to his well-fed, carefully shaven cheek—with his bare hand, it seemed at first, until a quick trickle of blood hurried down his chin on to the collar of his uniform. The playful slapper must have had a razor blade between his fingers.

Amid light laughter, the feat was repeated six or seven times before Tretjak, an odd awakening in his eyes, tried to break away. There was another short chase before he fell again. While he was prostrate, someone must have stepped—still playfully—on the back of his head so as to press his face deeper into the mud; and for some time, too, for when he rose at last, a little staggering, mud had entered his full-lipped mouth, and he stood there choking, surrounded by a circle of experts who laughed lightly.

In their eyes, too, something had woken up by then. The one with the thing between his fingers stepped forward once more, and this time he got an artery at the man's throat. He fell backward, and another man stepped on his belly, and on it he began to tread from one foot on to the other, with the slow movement butchers have, standing on the belly of a slaughtered beast.

The light laughter had died. There was utter silence in the circle now as the men looked on. Blood gushed from the man's throat at every tread; he was now lying in a large pool of blood. There was still a great abundance of blood in him when that other man came, with a rope, and strung him up, single-handed. The silent circle dispersed, and had vanished a moment later.

A star shell went up, somewhere very far away on a hill. A signal; maybe they had found the wreck of the aircraft, or else it meant something else. The grey dawn lay now on every face, and on every thing: the houses, the street, the pool of blood, the man hanging motionless; and on the ordinances, ukases, decrees and sundry exhortations pasted on the walls. Stalin Boulevard had emptied. Yes, it was almost day.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

It was this sudden silence that made the man in the pantry of the hospital raise his head and listen. It was called a hospital, in anticipation of what would be made of it in a year or two, or in a decade or two, once they could spare a doctor instead of Senior Nurse Probinkova who ran the place, (had run it, until a few hours ago, when she thought it better to lie low for a little while, since there had been differences of opinion with some sick camp men—they would insist on being pampered with powdered milk and what not, as if they were apparatchiks!). And the pantry was still called the pantry, though in winter it was now used as a morgue, when the permanent frost came up too high for them to dig in a corpse. In summer, when they had to dig in their corpses quick-quick, because of the quick-quick decomposition under a cloud of six million flies, the room was used to store an odd box or two, and as a rallying place by the rats. The window was fitted with iron bars. The door still had a heavy padlock. There was no light, but the night was fading.

Bebitz and Tretjak had withdrawn to this room about the same time, independently, to keep out of sight. From his dark corner Bebitz kept looking across to the far dark corner where Tretjak was. He could make out the blacker blackness of his bulk, scarcely outlined against the wall. Tretjak sat on an empty box, like himself. They had not exchanged a word. Odd, thought Bebitz; for me, after years of life underground, after many a foreign prison, sticking to the conspiratorial tradition of silence is instinctive and ingrained. But for him, who never left the Union? Is he now for the first time mindful of listeners, of the traitor, of the false friend, of the cell with the microphone? For the first time not the dispenser, but at the receiving end? And, Bebitz thought, I would like to see his face. He chuckled for a moment as he went on thinking, sitting there in the darkest corner on his empty box: I should not like to see my own. And then he thought, weightlessly, without a quickened heartbeat: Ursula is dead, Ursula.

Tretjak had left by then; without a word. At that time, you could

still leave unhindered. He did not return. It was not until later that two skeletons carrying guns and badges were posted outside the pantry door, and an old key creaked in the padlock. Bebitz looked at his own position with a strange feeling of detachment; it all happened to him in a layer of reality that was not his own. Ursula was dead, and something was happening to this Soviet Union, something beyond a stunned man's grasp; and Ursula was dead. Ursula. He checked himself in hot disapproval. Careful, he thought; you're groggy, be on your guard.

There was the noise outside then, on Stalin Boulevard. A man chased and caught? Was that Tretjak's voice? Then there was silence. His heart beat heavily, for the first time; he could not have said why. Dawn stood in the window. Then steps approached. The door was opened. A man—had he seen him before? A former prisoner-of-war? Schwan—was it Schwankov, or Schwanneke?—had joined the two skeletons. Their faces, in the grey dawn, were lit up by a rushlight. With his chin, the German signed to Bebitz: you there, come out. Not a word was spoken. Bebitz rose at once, and followed them.

As they led him along the short deserted stretch of Stalin Boulevard over to the Cultinst, he asked what the time was; he got no answer. There was a large pool of some dark liquid in the street, and something or someone strung up over there, too far away to be made out in the uncertain light. He asked what was the matter, and got no reply.

They led him into the house. The assembly hall lay now deserted. They crossed it, and knocked at a door and stepped inside. The room was fully and harshly lit, with several fuel lamps, two of them with bright reflectors staring from a table into Bebitz's face. There were several men sitting behind the table but, half-blinded, he could not make them out. As he stood in the full light now, it could be seen that he too looked ghostly, as if his face had lost all flesh in the last few hours. His eyes were embedded in pools of darkness. At the same time he looked composed. He looked as composed and correct as a corpse laid out in state after a death by violence.

At a sign from one of his guards—who at once stepped back—he set himself in motion, and did not stop until he almost bumped

into the table. He acted like a man stepping from a dark room into the light of day. Visibly, he was trying to find his bearings. Then he stood there, erect.

"Citizen Bebitz," said Yorkov from behind the lights. "Those are administrative proceedings. You stand here under suspicion."

"Suspicion?" said Bebitz. His voice was bodyless.

Ragoshin, behind the lights, thought: like that day; like those days—how many days and nights, when they grilled me, arc lights shining into my eyes? But we shall go back behind that, and begin at the beginning. Behind the lights, slumped over the table-top, a half-emptied sack of yellowness, he said, "If you want to sit down, Citizen——"

There was an angry and derisive muttering next to him where Yorkov sat—yes, toothless derision. Was this man Ragoshin, an unreliable customer in his day, who had to be prosecuted and removed—was he now presuming to teach him, Yorkov, how to deal with a suspicious character?

Ragoshin heard the muttering and ignored it, and repeated, "Won't you sit down?"

Bebitz sat down, on a chair at the narrow end of the table, next to Citizeness Assistant Teacher Varbarova with her pad and pen. She moved away from him, pettily scandalized.

Yorkov said, "By feloniously, and in flagrant betrayal of the high moral principles of pre-Stalinist Socialism, throwing a female Soviet citizen, viz. the Honoured Technician Ursula Toboggena, as a sexual victim into the arms of the Monopolo-Capitalist agent Watkins: do you confess to have murdered her?"

"—driven her to suicide?" Ragoshin toned it down. "Can you enlighten us on this matter?"

All right, then, thought Yorkov; all right. He understood. It was folly, and unprofessional. But had not Ivan the Terrible Yorkov himself been on the rack? Were they not going to begin at the beginning? "Yes," he said, almost mildly. "Enlighten us. It is getting late, Citizen. Had you not better—look, we should all be grateful. We all want some sleep, if we can, and you too, Citizen, you look lousy, to tell the truth. So had you not better make a clean breast of it, Citizen, but really a clean breast, without any Stalinist Fascist tricks and lies, and tell us just how and why Ursula Toboggena

had to be liquidated?" So there. They had knocked out his teeth for him, and made him lose his fingers and his toes, but—so there. Mild. So there.

Bebitz had been alert, over-wakeful in anticipation; now the reality, the very presence of this danger fraught with absurdity, was draining the rest of his energy. He almost fell asleep. He made a gesture of protest that was oddly awkward and ineffectual; and that was all.

Yorkov said, "There are witnesses." He too was suddenly very tired.

Bebitz opened his arms, in an oddly helpless gesture, and said, "Comrades, yes, I too am tired, and in distress. What do you want of me? Confess? I will confess, if you tell me what is to be confessed, and why, and that it is to the common good."

Yorkov said nothing.

Ragoshin said, "Put out the lights. It is nearly day."

They listened. A noise came from the small chamber next door.

Ragoshin nodded. He said, "Toboggen. He was asleep."

Yes, it was nearly day by then. As they put out the lights, their faces were white as those of dreamers, or of the dead.

"Ursula. Ursula." It was audible while he was still in the small chamber next door, to which he had withdrawn to rest. It was not an exclamation; he just said it in front of him, muttering. "Ursula," he muttered as he came in. Ah, it had taken possession of him again while he was resting; or maybe he had withdrawn because he felt that it took possession, and that he could resist no longer. Torches of revolution, a new world; but he muttered, "Ursula."

As he came in, he stopped, looking about, bewildered. "Where is she?" he said aloud, hoarsely. "You've got her, haven't you? Fished her out of the sea? I want to see her." He looked about, wild-eyed; he asked, "You haven't found her yet, Bebitz, have you? What's all this? A court? Inquest?"

Bebitz said, "The comrades want me to confess that I am responsible for Ursula's death."

Toboggen looked at them, from face to face. "I killed Ursula," he said quietly.

"Lou?" said Yorkov.

Bebitz said, "He is ill."

Ragoshin bent forward, to be nearer to Toboggen, and asked as you might a sick man or a child, "You killed her, Comrade President?"

Toboggen stared at him. "Yes," he said at last, scarcely audible.

Bebitz said, "Toboggen. Wake up. Wake up."

Toboggen said tonelessly, "I killed Ursula."

Yorkov said, "Why did you kill her, Comrade?"

Toboggen stared at him. "Why?" His forehead was furrowed, he had to think so hard. "She was the heron, high up. The migrating bird," he said evenly, a sober man, looking from face to face. "Never above me again, never, if I don't bring her down." He paused. And said quietly, "You won't understand."

"Bring down the heron?" said Ragoshin. He looked at Yorkov, who shrugged his shoulders.

The Citizeness Varbarova asked foolishly, "Do I take this down?"

"Bring her down," said Bebitz. "Others did that. You know it, Toboggen."

Toboggen shook his head. "The spiritual sin," he said quietly. "You won't understand."

Yorkov said, "Is there a doctor in the place?"

"No," said somebody at the door.

Ragoshin said, "Give the Comrade President a chair. Here, Toboggen, sit down, Toboggen."

Toboggen said, "I am quite all right. I won't sit down." He sat down heavily.

Yorkov asked, "How did you kill her?"

"The poor device," said Toboggen. "I killed her by the poverty of my device. That is all there is left to a man broken and no longer brilliant: the poor device." He thought heavily. "Also I wanted to rid her of—no, not of the American. He does not count. I wanted to rid her of Bebitz."

"Rid her of Bebitz?" said Ragoshin.

Bebitz asked quickly, "Why did you want to rid her of me?"

Toboggen said, scarcely audible, "I am jealous."

"Jealous?" said Bebitz. He nodded. And asked, "What would rid her of me?"

Toboggen said, "If she saw you turn somersaults. But that is where I failed. She died too soon to see." He thought it out, the pain of heavy thinking was on his forehead. "Or did she?" he asked, scarcely audible.

"Did she see me turn somersaults: is that what you are asking?" said Bebitz.

"Or didn't you?" said Toboggen. "Why is there nobody helping me? I can't think it out to the end. She must see you debased—you and the world you stand for, the world of the corrupters of our revolution. Making deals with—selling her to—what is his name? The American. I forget."

"Watkins?" said Bebitz.

Toboggen nodded. "Not deals from above but deals from down below: that was what I hoped would cure her. See you desert your beliefs."

Bebitz asked quietly, "Have I deserted my beliefs? Have I failed in my faith, Toboggen?"

Toboggen made a helpless gesture. "I cannot tell," he said. "I have failed myself. And I have lied."

Yorkov said, "Then why do you stop lying now?"

Toboggen said, "Because Ursula is dead. Because——" Here a change came over him. He had spoken quietly so far like a sane man. He went on quietly enough, but it was a quiet raving; like black water shooting through a ravine of smooth rock, almost noiselessly. "Because you have to stop lying some time," he said, breathing heavily. And then, without any apparent connection, he spoke of the skyscraper of Kiev.

When he left that small Baltic country for good and went to Russia—so he said—and came to that city in the Ukraine and saw a high house they had built there, too quickly, for quickness' and marvel's sake, with windows that did not fit, with foundations that had not set before they were built upon, a building rotting in the near corner before the far end was completed; and when in the evening they made him stand up at the meeting and asked him, well, Comrade, having travelled the world, have you seen such a nine days' wonder as our people's palace in their backward, decaying, Capitalistic West: who was he to dishearten them? Was he to break their vigour, to defile their faith, by telling them of the skyscrapers

of Manhattan? Was not their faith in their embattled fatherland or greater importance than a drab chunk of information? For it would be wrong to call information Truth. Truth was different. In truth, that building in Kiev, with its steel gained from the cannon of a discarded war, with its mortar mixed with the sweat and heart's blood of three thousand volunteers, was infinitely more soundly built and higher by many storeys than the Rockefeller Center in far-away New York. Yes, he told his hearers at the meeting, yes, Comrades, yours is the triumph, yours the victory. And again, when in Odessa, in the turmoil and enthusiasm of their pathetic fleet, they asked him, Comrade, have we not better ships: the true answer was—if only truth be understood as meaning the deeper truth—that they had better ships because they had better men to sail them; not better seamen, gunners, or admirals, but better men, with a conception of the high ideals and of men's dignity in their hearts that was ten times more exalted than any expert's in Britain or Germany.

Toboggen had spoken in a quiet raving, at great speed. He stopped, exhausted.

Yorkov said, "That's what you said at the preliminary investigation, that time." He laughed; it sounded like empty cans, hung up to scare the birds, colliding in the wind.

Toboggen looked at him, silent.

Ragoshin said, "When you denounced those others—those others, and yourself—was that again a case of lying for the sake of the greater and deeper truth?"

"Yes," said Toboggen, nodding many times. "Yes. Yes. Yes."

Bebitz asked, "And why do you speak up now?"

Toboggen said, "It will be a great thing now to be dead."

"To be dead?" said Bebitz. "Or do you speak up now, recanting your old recantations, belying what was your solemn oath in court—because now it is safe?"

"Safe?" said Toboggen.

Bebitz made an impatient gesture; the impatient gesture of an exhausted man. "Safe for you because you are now on top. The master of the masters."

"Am I?" said Toboggen.

Bebitz repeated his gesture, but he controlled himself. He said,

"You have lost your bearings, Toboggen. Or else you would not have betrayed our ideals and our dignity, in the presence of——" He waved his hand, indicating those in the room, those standing by the door.

Toboggen said, "Those? Can't you see the word Death written across their foreheads? You won't let them live to be witnesses."

"Toboggen," said Bebitz. "Toboggen, you are ill. There is a gap in your mind."

"Death written across our foreheads?" said Yorkov. He had been silent for some minutes, now he came to the fore again. He was outraged, and alarmed. "Death on our foreheads, and forgotten everything? Citizen, let us save time, let us bring this to an end. Are you mad, Comrade, are you asleep, drunk, ill? Never mind, there are things even a sleeping madman cannot forget while he is drunk. He cannot forget the burning maypole, the great signal. Did you or did you not give the signal, Comrade?"

Toboggen said, "A false signal."

"Of course," said Yorkov, trembling. He was trembling with the rage of an exhausted man. "You faked it, did you? What do you promise yourself by saying that you faked it?"

Ragoshin, yellow, fading, said, "Why a faked signal?"

Yorkov, trembling all over, shouted, "Are you aware that if we're really to believe you—— This is a revolutionary situation! It would be punishable with death."

Bebitz said quietly, "What did you fake?"

Toboggen said tonelessly, "I gave the signal. I had a patient, back in the woods, a small spy of the Ministry. He told me. I knew the Ministry were using those signals as a trap. Creating little local revolts that could be drowned in blood. I wanted the little revolt—no, their unease, their fear that there might be a revolt—to stop you. Yes, you, Bebitz. You would take days, to find out. I must gain evidence of their humiliation—your humiliation, Bebitz—to keep my child. And if it were only for a few days. They had taken from me my child years back—and would take her again now—and I could not go on living. That's why I faked the signal. That's how I killed Ursula."

Yorkov, white-faced, with trembling lips, said, "You're just dreaming. You're just mad."

Bebitz said, "You did not expect the real revolution that would flare up on your signal?"

Toboggen asked tonelessly, "Is there a real revolution?"

"Yes," said Ragoshin, getting up clumsily, a half-empty sack of yellowness, and coming out from behind the table. "Yes, what if—there is no real revolution?"

Yorkov, with a violent, desperate gesture, shouted, "You are all mad."

"It may have flared up only in the district," Bebitz said. "Maybe only Kolyma country, down to Magadan. Two million men, not ten."

Ragoshin said, "And what if it is only the sixteen camps in our cluster on this side of the forest? One hundred and sixty thousand men." He placed another step, and another three steps, between himself and the table behind which they had made him sit, and went on, "In that case it was wrong to deal with this situation the way we did—on your instigation."

"My instigation, ha," said Yorkov, toneless. His face, a dead man's.

They all wheeled round at the sound of a high-pitched voice. It was that man in the townish coat, the apparatchik. He had made his declaration of loyalty, condemning the Fascist Stalin and all his works, he had been sitting there ever since and had not uttered a single word; they had quite forgotten his existence; but now he got up, there he stood, thin, of a miserable countenance, and stood there shouting. "I never wanted to—I have been misled," he shouted, high-pitched. Long-stepping, spider-legged, he reached the door. Turning, lifting a feeble fist, he shouted, "Just to write a report—out of proletarian watchfulness!" He crossed the empty assembly hall, and pushed the entrance door open against the morning's greyness and a freshening wind which—you could just see it—carried away his hat. Chasing it awkwardly out there along the deserted Boulevard he fell out of sight.

The assistant teacher Varbarova got up. She was collecting her pad and papers when Yorkov stepped up to her and silently, violently, tore the last sheet she had written out of her hand. The woman looked at him and gave a single wail, and turned to walk out, stiltedly fugitive.

Yorkov had grabbed the sheet, and more sheets and the pad that were still on the table. He held them all out to Bebitz and said hoarsely, "Here you are." As Bebitz did not move to take them, he tore them right through, and tore them right through again, and threw the litter before Bebitz's feet. Hoarsely, he said, "I want an answer. Death written on our foreheads, what?" He shouted, "I want an answer!" Ah, a spectre, toothless and fingerless. He was trembling heavily.

Bebitz said, "Why on your forehead? Why not on mine?"

They stopped, and listened. Someone said, "The American."

Yes, a voice was outside in the assembly hall. Mr. Walter M. Watkins had risen from his sleep.

They listened. Yorkov said to Bebitz, "He is looking for you."

Bebitz said, "He is looking for Ursula Toboggna."

Ragoshin said, "He does not know. He must not know. Never mind on whose forehead death may be written. Whoever may be the winner. Do you hear, Comrades? He must not know!"

CHAPTER XXXIX

YES, he must have slept at last, on that embroidered couch; the sick sleep before dawn. He looked red-eyed and dishevelled, and for the first time he looked his age. He came in without knocking, he looked at them, past them, like a man whose mind is still absent in his sleep or dream. Without greeting them, without a word of cheer, he said, "Seen Smith? When I woke up he was gone." Only now he seemed to become aware of Bebitz's presence. "Hullo," he said flatly. And asked, charmless, graceless, a flabby man just signing with his head, not lowering his voice, "Who are they?"

Bebitz said, "Functionaries you have not yet met."

"New Functionaries?" said the American, stifling a yawn. "What's all this mystery? You'd think there was something afoot. I have a sixth sense for situations. The professional politician, you know. Only the fact that this son of mine I am punished with shook me out of my sleep to say—what did he say again, or request me to do?—I say, only the fact that he thinks there is something up, something dramatic, convinces me that there is no change."

"Witty," said Bebitz tiredly, showing his bare teeth in a smile to which his eyes were not a party.

Yarkow said, "Change? There is no change."

Ragoshin said, "In your country you must be used to some small shiftings in the democratic machinery."

Watkins looked at him for a long time. His eyes were more wakeful now. He asked, "You Toboggen? No." He looked from face to face, and said to Toboggen, "I ought to have recognized you, sir. I was promised your acquaintance. Your daughter may have mentioned me to you. Miss Ursula Toboggen. Tovarich Ursula Toboggena, Honoured Technician. Regarding her, there is something I should have wished to discuss with you in private."

Toboggen—no, he said nothing.

Yarkow stood there, a spectre, and said, more dead than living, and serious and with dignity, "We have no secrets."

Watkins said, "I love your daughter, Toboggen. I am greatly in love with her."

„Toboggen—ah, this time he found his voice. He said, with a great effort, “She is very lovable.”

Watkins said, “I looked for her. Where is she? I insisted on her going with me, I said it in wrath. Later I—begged—of this man, Bebitz—with empty hands—to let her go. Are you hiding her from me because it was going to be with empty hands, doing nothing for you in turn?”

Ragoshin—ah, a half-empty sack of yellowness, and his lips trembling, if you looked at him properly; but was he not Brilliance Ragoshin all the same? Instead of his friend Toboggen, who stood there swaying and could not speak, he said, smiling, “We have no private lives. We are soldiers of an idea. Someone may even have Death written across his forehead—and yet, and yet. He will serve.”

Watkins said, “It is not easy for me to find my bearings, in your world of savage laws. Serve? Soldiers? What makes you folks tick?”

They stood there, men resurrected from their graves, but smiling. There was no answer.

Watkins said, groping, “Because—there might be a way out. No private lives, you said. I too, in a vastly different sense, I know—I too shan’t manage to achieve my dream of that private life I wanted to lead with Ursula. If you were to see your way——”

He stopped. A tall, gaunt man had come in. You’d think a skeleton, but for the gash he had on his forehead, with lazily trickling blood. He staggered, but then he stood there erect.

Ragoshin said, “Has our time come, your Excellency, Hero of the Soviet Union, Marshal Protogeroff?”

The gaunt man nodded.

Yarkow said, “Will it be a fight? Withdrawal to old positions?” He looked at the old man searchingly. “Not even a fight?” he muttered with trembling lips.

The two of them had stepped up to Protogeroff by the door.

“And Toboggen?” the Marshal said.

Ragoshin shook his head. “Let him stay,” he said quietly. “He must stay.”

A machine-gun was audible, far away.

They stood there, listening.

Protogeroff said, “We’ll have to wait for another year.”

“For another decade,” said Yarkow.

Ragoshin said, "And what it is for another century? You cannot wait too long for the Great Liberation."

"Wait," said Yarkov, "But live?"

Ragoshin said, "Why live? Why must you live?" The machine-gun was audible, far off. He went on, "Comrades, why must we live?" Ah, a half-empty sack of yellowness, and now he was sagging, the Marshal Protogcroff held him up, ghost-like, Ivan the Terrible Yarkov supported him. There they stood in the door, the three of them, dust on their faces, and the machine-gun, and two machine-guns far away, and now a third, nearer up the street.

"Millions, waiting," Ragoshin said, in a strangely powerful voice, while they held him up. "Can you hear them, Comrades, behind the guns? Millions, waiting!"

Yarkov said, "Come."

They had vanished, a moment later.

Toboggen had taken a few steps to follow them. "Brothers," he said, very quietly. But they had gone, ah, they had gone. There was no one in the room now but Toboggen and Bebitz and the American.

Watkins said, "And as there won't be a private life for me anyway—what was it again? A loan? After all, why not a loan?" He felt very tired. With an old man's voice, he went on, "I might still work that loan—with the help of Ursula." He stared at Toboggen, and asked quietly, "Why do you cry?"

It was light by then. The lamps and lanterns on the table grew pale and, indeed, later somebody put them out. In the room, where the three men were, there was still the dusk of dawn. Outside the machine-guns had stopped, suddenly. It was a deceptive day: sun close above you, but the soil still shrouded in the milky, translucent morning fog they have in those parts, that blinds you utterly.

CHAPTER XL

SHE climbed up, and in, from Stalin Boulevard, over the window-sill. As for the exact time, there was some uncertainty. Some said later that there was no connection between her arrival and the disintegration that began in the back room of the Cultinst, with the three camp men and Bebitz and Tohoggen and the American. They said that she came in much later (and, indeed, when she climbed in, only her father and Bebitz were still in the room). But others said that she arrived before, that shouts, and the fire of a solitary machine-gun put up by the Marshal to ward off air attacks, and the noise of her small engine, had been audible for some time; that they were indeed—so they said—the reason, the signal, for the Marshal, the Public Prosecutor, and the Editor of *Pravda*, to withdraw. Day was outside, sun and the quickly rising morning fog, and there she climbed in over the window-sill, and stood there, breathing quickly.

"Hullo, Comrade," she said to Bebitz. "I just spotted you in here, and it's too far to the entrance round the house. How's things?" She brushed back the hood of the shoddy flying suit in which she was clad, and shook her gaily dishevelled hair, laughing. Turning to the window, she called out into the street, "Come up here. You can come in."

The citizen Silber put in an appearance, emerging out there and scaling the sill with scant elegance. He looked awkward, and disorderly, and frozen, and none the worse for it.

She said, "Bebitz, have you met Citizen Silber? Ah, I remember, the citizens met before, I believe."

"How d'ye do," said the citizen, and advanced one step as if to shake Bebitz's inanimate hand; but he desisted.

Ursula—gay, but there was a slight trembling in her gaiety, if you but listened deep enough—said, a little too loud, "We pinched the plane. You probably never noticed we were away?" She shook her dishevelled hair; the wind, the sunny gusts of wind elbowing in through the open window kept wafting it over her forehead. She said, "You see, Bebitz, I thought before I start that journey with—

he is so foreign, you see. I am frightened of him. Of Watkins, I mean. I know, Soviet Man oughtn't to be frightened, of course—but I am so frightened. Maybe because I ought to hate him really, and don't. He is so old. I am so much in two minds about him. Soviet Man oughtn't to be put in a situation where you are in two minds. So I decided—it was a sudden inspiration. In fact we discussed it, the citizen and me."

"Absolutely," the citizen Silber corroborated, standing by her side.

She said, "I was so distressed. Determined, of course, but so distressed. Ah, I was so distressed. So we thought—it was the citizen's brainwave. He is so clever. We thought, all right, going with an American and all, and maybe, as you said, maybe he will seduce me and everything—and highly important too, what with loans, and camps nobody must know about, and revolutions—you said it, didn't you? But, we thought, first have a try and reach Vladivostok, or at least Magadan, and see what's up. Maybe something would save me—save me from having to be seduced to America? Dialectically absolutely correct. Check up on the bloody thing. Secretly, of course. You wouldn't have let us, would you? Why don't you say something, Bebitz? Don't stand there like a monument of—was it salt? Now, would you have let us? Though you didn't know—there was something a little wrong with that plane. It was so—so wobbly. It was—it was a little—I thought our number was up, really. We——" Ah, she must stop for a second, her voice atremble; she might have had some momentary doubts in that fateful second up in the all but disintegrating plane, and now she remembered. But then, why remember, was she not saved from death? "I thought our number was up, really," she repeated gaily, with that far echo of her emotion trembling in her voice. "We just wobbled and wobbled on and—there were things missing in the plane—you would have worried. Ah, you would have so much worried. Why don't you say something, Bebitz? Now you are mad at me, probably. You wouldn't have let us go in spite of the citizen being such a wonderful—he can improvise everything with string. He is so clever with his fingers. Look at his—— Citizen, show them how you can improvise with string. Like a Kibbutznik."

"Kibbutznik?" That was Bebitz's first word.

"Stakhanovite Palestinian Collective Farmer," Ursula said lightly.

The citizen Silber said modestly, "There isn't such an improviser with string like me in all Palestine and Germany and the Soviet Union." There he stood, a thin boy just back from death, and was blushing deeply.

She nodded confirmation. The wind through the window, the sunny wind, was playing havoc with her dishevelled hair. With that far echo trembling in her voice she said, "We had such rows, me and the citizen—hadn't we, Citizen? In the mist and dawn, regarding where East and West and South is and such things. In spite—I have a little compass, look; but it must first be cleaned. He said it all wrong, but——"

"You," said the citizen, "you said it all wrong."

"You," said Ursula. "Completely wrong. Only in spite of you forcing me in the wrong direction, we got there. It was a Petite of yours."

"Petite?" That was Bebitz.

"A dialectical method," Ursula said. "The Jewish comrades invented it."

"Absolutely," said the citizen Silber.

"Hullo, Father," said Ursula.

His legs would not carry him. It had taken him a thousand years to get up from his stool, and to cross the room towards her, swaying, and there he stood at last. He had to hold on to the table-top, he was so weak; he was so strong, his heart was hammering signals in a Morse code that he could not decipher. He tried to approach her nearer still and step up close to her, but could not. He whispered, "Ursula."

"I'm so glad you are all right," she said. "But you do still look—you must have a rest. I want you to meet—this is Mojshe, Father. I know you met him. But then—it was in a different dialectical situation. He just came to my room under false pretences. False three times over. He is such a Ganef."

The young man stood there, a pale survivor, and made a deprecating gesture appropriate to such flattery. "Not worth mentioning," he said, and blushed again. "How else ought I to have managed to talk to her? Absolutely. How d'ye do, Citizen?" He

made a movement as if to step forward and shake Ursula's father by the hand, but he was too shy.

Ursula said, "There was a mix-up with that revolution, Father. You got it all wrong." She turned to the young man. "Lend me your comb, Citizen, will you? You put it back in your pocket. No, not in that one. An improviser with sting, but then again you're such a baby with your hands." She pulled the comb out of his outer pocket and tried to cope with her dishevelled hair. The wind was in it, the wind.

Bebitz said, "You have been—to Magadan?"

"Yes," she said, busy with her hair. "That revolution was a mix-up. My god, what a mix-up. I didn't tell them. In fact, it was the idea of the citizen that we'd better not tell. Just have the plane fixed and say nothing and fly back to tell you first."

Toboggen said, "About—the revolution?"

"There is no revolution," said Ursula, busy with her hair. "We flew over all the camps, right down to Magadan, and then back again. No revolution. Work squads marching out with their guards, everywhere. Not a flicker of a revolt. At Magadan, I enquired carefully. The citizen enquired, really. It was quite wrong how he enquired—but, oh, so careful. They don't know a thing. A few test signals burnt on the hill-tops by the Ministry, as they sometimes do, to get a few rebels to come out into the open, if there are rebels. There was not a rebel."

Bebitz said, "So—Poshansk——?"

"They knew contact with Poshansk was interrupted," said Ursula. "A first blizzard where the wires go over Pokrovski Hill? Or a tree down on the wires? They didn't worry. They sent up a breakdown gang to fix it."

Toboggen said, "Then the Revolution of Poshansk—all alone, in utter isolation——"

"But, dear," said Ursula, still combing her hair, and with those far echoes of death and danger and emotion still trembling in her voice, "there isn't any revolution of Poshansk. Where is it? We circled low over the Camp, coming in, a few minutes ago. One sees a lot, in such a slow plane, doesn't one, Citizen? Women's brigades out in the cabbage fields. Men's gangs toiling in the open-cast workings. Guards. We could even see a few being dug in. Must

have been a funeral. Quite a few. And look out into the street. All empty. They must have gone back. Isn't that so, Citizen?"

The citizen Silber said, "It's a great moral victory for the Soviet Union."

"The citizen is very much in favour of the Soviet Union," said Ursula. "Aren't you, Citizen?" She had done with her hair; she put the comb back in his pocket.

"The train," Bebitz said raucously. "We have stayed much too long here. We must leave at once."

"But you wouldn't manage as quickly as all that, dear," said Ursula.

"Where is the Local Commandant?" said Bebitz. "Gone back to the Camp? The Party Secretary," he called out. "The station-master. The Militia."

Citizen Gorbakov appeared in the door, and others.

"Citizens," Bebitz said, "what about the train? I shall have you up for trial if you don't get the train ready at once. We must get back."

"Ahead," said Ursula. "Not back but ahead to Vladivostok, with our American. Zarotyn is already there. Negotiating with someone the American President sent over; they seemed to know at Magadan. Maybe—a loan? Maybe all this—and all of us—and all our schemes and revolutions and excitements—were not all that important, after all? Small-part actors in a great play, all of us? Going up a side-track—while the world rolled on? The puppets of Poshansk!" She added, in a very light voice, "You'd better hurry."

Gorbakov said, "Parts have been stolen from the railway engine, owing to cultural backwardness. No steam can be got up."

"You'll pay for that," Bebitz said in an undertone. He was like a caged animal.

Gorbakov said, "The copper steam-pipe, owing to lack of education and counter-revolutionary——"

There were shouts somewhere, out in the street—or was it down by the railway track?—and answering shouts. They were all listening. A soldier came up to the window, with a megaphone, and reported, "A breakdown gang, with an engine, from down

South. They asked, is everything all right at Poshansk? They'll send a relief train up in the afternoon.

"An engine——?" Bebitz said hoarsely,

The soldier said, "They're just pushing back again."

"They are——?" Bebitz said. In a frenzy, he tore the megaphone out of the man's hand and shouted through it, down to the railway track, "Hi, breakdown gang, I say." It sounded grossly unprofessional; the whisper of a man's most hidden anguish, monstrously amplified.

Toboggen, with a quiet gesture, took the megaphone from Bebitz's hand and called out, steady and powerful, "Stop. Engine. Stop. Engine. Stop."

A shout came back, muffled by the distance.

Toboggen called out, "This is Bebitz calling. Senior Specialist Bebitz calling, of the Secretariat of Foreign Trade."

A shout came back, muffled. Toboggen looked at Bebitz, questioning.

Bebitz, hoarse, whitefaced, said, "Tell them I order them to come back at once. At once. The engine is requisitioned. I order them to hook on a coach for myself and my party, to pull us out East, Vladivostok way."

"Stop!" shouted Toboggen. "Stop!"

CHAPTER XL

WAS it a mere 'twenty minutes later? The world, the wind, the people's faces were different. The sun had broken through and the fog had gone. The breakdown engine, with a railway coach, stood ready alongside the station platform. Much coming and going went on between the station and the hotel, over the short slope that will become the People's Garden for Rest and Culture. Only in the rear part of the hotel hall, deserted at this early hour, there were some shadows, though the door was left wide open, right into Stalin Boulevard and the sun.

Toboggen was sitting in there, not far from the door, but those passing outside took no notice of the man sitting in the dusk. Someone had found him a comfortable chair, and a rug was spread over his knees. He had grown older by ten years in the last ten hours.

Ursula was standing in front of him. She was changed. She was ready, ready to depart. She was wearing her good overcoat and gloves, and a paper bag in her hand, and her suitcase was standing next to her on the floor. She said, "And from Vladivostok, if Bebitz and Zarotyn, and of course with my help—if we get the American to sign, or to promise at least, ah, there will probably have to be all sorts of promises—why not promises, they don't very much matter, do they? I mean politically, if you give them with the right dialectical reservations—of course *our* promises, *he* being a gentleman must keep *his*—ah, what was I saying? From Vladivostok—and Bebitz will sign too, if we can manage to get something signed, second signature after Comrade Zarotyn, it's a great honour. And after the signature over Monopolo—I mean the victory over Monopolo-Capitalism and all that—dialectical victory—we'll go back to Moscow, straight back by special train—well, with special reserved seats at least, don't you think? Special diplomatic seats, and from Moscow Bebitz will be sent abroad—well, not really abroad but nearly, to the Occupied Zone to Berlin, to act as a special adviser to the Soviet Military Commander—it's a great honour, and it's nearly as good as abroad, isn't it? And in the Occupied Zone I shall give twelve addresses on the Role of Soviet Woman in the Partisan

Fight, against the Fascist Invader under the Leadership of Comrade Stalin—I mean the Partisan Fight under the Leadership. Because he is so brilliant, Bebitz is, and his bravery and sacrifices for the Party and all, and I with him, and I'm so much looking forward to it—it's nearly abroad, and I am so curious, I am so curious." She swallowed her tears, with a brave effort, and said, "I'm so happy."

"Yes," said Tobeggon.

"And regarding the citizen Silber," said Ursula, "regarding the citizen—Citizen, why are you sitting there saying nothing? Come over here—regarding the citizen, Father, of course Bebitz is right, we can't take him along to Vladivostok, let alone help him abroad; it takes papers and papers and papers to help a citizen abroad, inland passports and outland passports and an ukase and three *propusks* and a camp release and a Ministry Good Conduct Testimonial and five testimonials by five Party members who have known him for at least twenty years. How can they, he is only—seventeen, he says, but I figured it out, he is only fifteen and seven months, he is such a liar, ah, he is such a liar! So how can the five Party members testify? And an inoculation certificate and a delousing certificate—have you a delousing certificate, Citizen? He hasn't. And photographs, sixteen photographs, have you—you don't have a little photograph, Citizen, have you, by any chance? Just to remember, because you have such a—such a funny face. A completely idiotic face really, biologically speaking. And without all that he could only stow away, behind our backs, of course, but where can one stow away to in the Soviet Union? One has to step out in the end somewhere, and Bebitz says there isn't any room in the railway coach to stow away at any rate—it's such a small coach. It would be a mortal danger, and, Father, I'm very happy, the citizen is saved the mortal danger, and I hope the citizen is happy too. Aren't you, Citizen? Aren't you?"

The citizen Silber sat there dejectedly on a stool, turned away from her, using a flashy penknife to cut his fingernails. He said nothing.

Ursula said, "And, Father, it is very kind of you, considering Bebitz will arrange for you to be sent as a special negotiator to the United States, because it's such a triumph that you are alive—you

are, aren't you? they are such liars! Just to hand you around and show you to them, so they see we are worthy to get a loan. It is very kind of you, very kind, that meanwhile you will keep an eye on the citizen, and maybe even take him along all the same if it can be fiddled—I mean arranged—and he gets all the *propusks* and photographs. He is so uneducated, so uneducated that he really looks forward to going to the United States. And it's very kind of you that you will try to keep him out of mischief; he is such a baby, such a liar but such a baby all the same, and it's nice to think that maybe you two together can sometimes think of me." She swallowed her tears, and stood there all ready for the journey, with a paper bag in her hand, and repeated, "It's nice to think you might."

"Yes," said Toboggen.

The citizen Silber said nothing.

"And," said Ursula, "and regarding the article of women's fashions—" Tears were in her voice, she fought them bravely, but it was a losing battle. "Regarding the fashion article," she went on, and took it out of the paper bag she was carrying. It was a lady's hat; one of her fingers was strong enough to carry it. "Regarding this article," she went on with a stifled voice, "it was sweet of you, Father, very sweet, very very sweet, that you convinced me I mustn't throw it away in contempt, as I should have done of course." No, she could not carry on, tears blotted out her voice, but she conquered them like a brave warrior. She said, "I'll use this article only for great political occasions. I'll hold it in high esteem."

"Yes," said Toboggen, and smiled at her, desperately and reassuringly. "Yes, child. Yes."

The citizen Silber had said nothing. Now he turned round and said, "All right, Citizen. Of course you must go ahead. Don't worry about me, I'll be fine. Razor blades first quality, and second quality, and all that, and—I'm thinking about a new line. Trained fleas—there were trained fleas. But trained bugs? A bug circus, a brainwave, a novelty. Gentiles, in case I get to America—would a gentile laugh about such a thing? They would. A bug circus for gentiles to laugh about. Atomic. So don't worry about me, just go ahead." Ah, a callous business man with bright prospects, and he had

spoken bravely, but it was just too much. "And what do I care, he went on, in an onrush of great emotion, "what do I care if the cut my head off all the same? And if you probably read in a newspaper occasionally in the small news that an unidentified body was found floating in the sea, at least you'll know who it is. What does it matter? Another Jew." Ah, a very young callous bug-tamer and business man, and he had spoken with sincere emotion; now he turned away again and went on with his fingernails.

"No," said Ursula, deeply moved. "No, you mustn't. Father, will you promise you won't let him? It's unethical. Do you hear? Have you no ethics and all that, Citizen? Can't you—you'll build up a beautiful life for yourself, and forget. You aren't old, are you—you are still young."

"Young," he said (and maybe he was really not seventeen but only fifteen and seven months?)—"all right. I'm young, but what do you know about how old I am inside? Inside, I have a white beard."

"Father," said Ursula, "what shall I do? He is such a baby. You will look after him, won't you?"

"Yes," said Toboggen, "I will, I will."

"Thank you so much," she said, with a little sigh of relief. "It's a situation—it's such a situation! I haven't received the proper specialized training to deal with such a situation." Emotion welled up in her again. "And whenever the nightingales and what you call it, in a moonlit night——" She stopped. "Oh," she said in an altered voice, "Bebitz."

But he did not come over. He had stopped in the open door to Stalin Boulevard. He was on his way from his hotel room down to the station with the waiting train. He wore his black, impeccable overcoat, and his fine fur cap. While he stood there, he half turned his head back to the citizenship Assistant Teacher Varbarova, who acted as a substitute for Holobenko of the Press Trust who was ill. "An interview?" "Bebitz said. "I told you everything, when we arrived last night."

She said, with a mournful voice, "But Comrade Senior Specialist, the new situation——"

He interrupted her, "There is no new situation."

"No new situation?" she said, offended and flustered at the same time.

He said, "As for some minor incidents——" He stopped, having caught sight of Toboggen and Ursula. "Ah, Toboggen," he said and left the citizeness standing and stepped inside. He smiled. His face was grey and very tired. "It's good to see you once more, and to see that you are well. We are leaving." He turned to Ursula. "Still up here, dear? You should take your things down to the train. We are leaving in a minute."

"Yes, Bebitz," she said quietly.

"What's that?" he said, signing at the hat.

"That?" she said, looking at it as if she saw it for the first time. She let it revolve round her finger. "A women's fashion article, it appears," she said lightly, and put it back in the paper bag. She stepped close to Toboggen, and for a moment it looked as if she were going to bend down to him. But she did not. There was a foot's width of distance between her and him. No, she did not bend down. She touched him with her little finger, and that was all, and said in a very light voice, "Well then, goodbye."

"Goodbye, Ursula," said Toboggen. A rug was spread over his idle knees.

Ursula said, "Goodbye—Citizen Silber." She turned abruptly and left, and did not turn back, and left, and left.

They were all looking after her, in silence. Then Bebitz said, "She has forgotten her suitcase, Citizen."

The young man got up, and took the case, and wanted to say something, and did not, and blushed.

"She will miss it," said Toboggen quietly.

"Yes," said the young man awkwardly, and left.

Bebitz turned quickly to Toboggen. Out there the Citizeness Varbarova had long disappeared. They were alone. Bebitz said, "You want to talk to me."

Toboggen said, "You must arrest me."

"No," said Bebitz.

"You must arrest me, Bebitz," said Toboggen, "and send me up for trial. You know it is madness wanting to send me to America.

You made it easy for Ursula, for a moment. But we both know that Moscow won't consent."

Bebitz shook his head.

"Don't be a bloody fool," said Toboggen harshly. "Don't destroy your career. You know you must put me up for trial, the moment Ursula turns her back. There were scores of witnesses.

Bebitz said, "Tretjak is dead. The others won't open their mouths for fear."

"And Yakut? You're crazy. They were all witnesses," said Toboggen stubbornly, "not only of my signal. They were witnesses of—the Great Illusion—that it provoked. Millions, waiting. Millions—waiting! You must put me under arrest right now."

Bebitz shook his head. "True—if you had really believed that it was not illusion but reality. The real thing. But doing what you did, knowing in your heart of hearts all the time that the power of our system was really unshakable? Millions waiting, but, man, they are ghosts. You know well enough, Toboggen, that we don't subscribe to suicides. No, my official opinion is——"

"That I must be mad?" Toboggen looked at him.

Bebitz shook his head. "Under great personal risk, by heroically lighting the signal, you lured potential rebels into the open, thus enabling the Ministry to crush them. It was an act of Marxist-Stalinist watchfulness, making you eligible not only for a complete amnesty but for being entrusted with an eminent task abroad." He said it stonily.

Toboggen stared at him. "Clever," he said very quietly. "Killing many a bird at one throw. Only, I won't play. Do you hear? Do you think I shall save this shabby life of mine—and be put to eternal shame by Protogeroff and Ragoshin and—ah, even that old bloodhound Yarkov would put me to eternal shame." He raised his voice. "Do you hear, man? I won't play!"

"Your very refusal," Bebitz said, unmoved, "would force me after all really to believe——" He stopped.

Toboggen asked very quietly, "That I must be mad?"

"An ugly word," Bebitz said. "Let us say—momentarily deranged."

"Drunk, you mean," said Toboggen, nodding. "I feel like a fly in the spider's web. Do you know all the answers, do you hold all the trumps? The new Soviet Man! But you are a fool all the same. You are missing your better chance. Instead of burdening yourself with the responsibility for my survival—it would be no small thing for your career either, laying low for good the last one—of the old guard." He asked very lightly, "Marshal Protogeroff—Yarkov the Terrible—Brilliance Ragoshin—dead by now? Or is it part of your official opinion that at any rate they were mere apparitions, out of their graves?"

"How you despise me," Bebitz said quietly. His face was grey with tiredness. He went on, "But even on the level of your contempt: do you really think it would help my—how did you call it?—my career—if my wife's father were exposed as the ringleader of a new revolution?"

Toboggen looked at him for a long time. "Forgive me," he said at last. "I forget. I am an old man. I did not think of Ursula as your wife."

"How you hate me," Bebitz said quietly. "How they all hate me. Is it my unhappiness that makes them all hate me so very much? You put me to the test, Toboggen. And I am asking you for the second time: have I failed so badly, in this visitation?"

"A monk's expression," said Toboggen. "Shall I answer this question to a monk? We are all sinners."

There were hasty footsteps outside. They were both smiling as they turned to the door, Bebitz said, "Ursula."

"Hullo," she said. "I've come back just for a moment. Here I am again. It's so crowded in the coach. The conductor says it's really overcrowded; he oughtn't to take me really, there is no room. It's laughable, isn't it? He'll take me, though, of course. I told him, of course he must, but it's so laughable. So I've come back just for a moment, since there is a bit of time left because you haven't come over, Bebitz. So I thought I can come once more and say good-bye." She was all in a flutter, and her voice so light. She said, "It's so funny him saying there is no room." She held a paper bag in her hand, weightless. She said to Bebitz, "Just fetching you. Have you finished?"

"Yes, we have finished," Bebitz said.

"Hullo, Father," said Ursula.

"Hullo, child," Toboggen said. A rug was lying over his idle knees.

Bebitz said, "Yes, I have finished." Irritably, he turned and asked, "What is it?"

The Citizeness Varbarova had appeared in the door again. She said, complaining, "We were interrupted."

"The interview," Bebitz said. "Where did we get to?"

She read mournfully from the pad, "There is no new situation. As for some minor incidents——"

In a voice that was quiet but audible in the farthest corner of the room, Bebitz dictated, "There is no new situation. As for some minor incidents that to the short-sighted, to the easily impressed, may for a fleeting second have seemed significant, they had in fact no significance. For those incidents must disintegrate with the morning fog and shrink into nothingness in face of the belief—no, correct that—in face of the rock-like, unshakable conviction that the cause of the common man will conquer, of all common men, free men and slaves, yes, of millions waiting, millions waiting, and yet, even their slavery——"

"Bebitz," Toboggen interrupted him, touching his arm. "Steady, Bebitz. Steady."

Bebitz looked at him for a moment with burning eyes, and went on dictating with a firm voice, "—even their slavery and their very lives are but the brick and mortar of the great edifice of ultimate liberation, when there will be no power on earth that could resist, however—have you got that, Comrade Assistant Teacher?—however fragile may be the vessel, however quickly the individual may fall to dust who has been singled out to carry the flame——" His voice gave out, his face was very white. There he stood in his fine fur cap and expensive overcoat, and it looked for a moment as if he were swaying.

"Bebitz," said Ursula. "Bebitz."

"This must not be printed," Toboggen said in an undertone. "You're mad."

Bebitz said, "Where did we get to, Comrade?"

She read from her pad, "—singled out to carry—"

"—to carry the flame," he said, standing there black clad, lonely, abandoned to concentration, "to carry it in spite of it all, in spite of temptations, and humiliations; and visitations—and of the great vanity that dwells in the secret of his own heart."

He stopped. Toboggen had bent forward and taken the writing-pad from the woman's hand. He tore off her notes, and tore them across, and tore the torn pieces across again.

"Oh," she said, outraged.

People, silent listeners, had gathered in the opening of the door, men of Poshansk and passengers of the train. It was through these bystanders that the Citizen Sub-District Commissioner Attona pushed his way.

"Pardon me, Comrades," he was heard to call out even before he emerged. "Comrades, pardon me." He was breathless, and ready. God only knew how he came by a large buttonhole composed of artificial red carnations, with a small cardboard picture of Comrade Stalin stuck between them artistically. He exclaimed, "Ah, here you are, Comrade Bebitz, I just——" He stopped, and took in the situation, and said, "What's that, an interview again? Now, Comrade, I suggested to you before to let me deal with the comrade journalist—which is dialectically correct because I enjoyed the advantage of several journalistic contributions to the Ministry Journal. You are lucky, Comrade Journalist, for I just have a minute for you before—— What do you want to know? About the events of the night? Now, here is a piece of advice to you. Never speak about things in general. It is against Marxist-Stalinist principles to be vague. Speak about—concrete, men, personalities, that's what the citizens lap up—I mean to say, what their mercilessly high education demands. Write about—apart from the inspiration and leadership we've had from Comrade Stalin, of course—write about Comrade Bebitz here, or about me. The citizens in this district always love reading about—— They just can't help loving me! Tell them, terrible shock for me of course, that false, mysterious misunderstanding that would have turned us all into fettered slaves of counter-revolutionary reaction in the pay of Western Fascist Capitalism—got that? Western Fascist Cap——? Terrible shock, and me so sensitive—write: sensitive where the interests of the

toiling masses are concerned—But in the general panic, you can write that I was like a—you must admit that. I was like a tiger. Nerves of steel—you can write that down. No, not steel. Could be misunderstood as an unwarranted aspiration. Write: iron. Write: thanks to the merciless Stalinist proletarian watchfulness of Comrade Attona, the always popular——” He stopped, he looked outside, he called out mellifluously, “Hi, Comrade Apparatchik.” He turned to Bebitz and Toboggen and exclaimed, “He is going down to the train directly, and I haven’t had an opportunity——” He turned, and raced off, pushing his way through the bystanders at the door and shouting, “Hi, Comrade Apparatchik, if you’d favour me by waiting just a second, Comrade Apparatch——” He faded, his rubbery countenance, his voice, the sound of his running feet.

An old man was led past, frail, with white locks, with a round hat made of rabbit fur. A soldier held him upright.

“He’s been found sleeping in a chair, back there in a corner,” said somebody. “Old Lalles, an old Jew, a cadger.”

“Yes,” said the old man, in a weak but strangely clear voice. “Yes.”

Someone asked him, “What were you doing during the revolution?”

“Revolution?” the old man said.

Someone said, “He doesn’t know a thing. Been sleeping right through. He knows nothing of anything.”

The old man said, “I have been saved!”

They followed him as he was led away; they crowded after him, they disappeared. It was thus that Mr. Walter Mayflower Watkins became visible in the doorway; maybe he had been standing there for some little time. He was all ready for the journey.

His son kept in the background, a young man matured by life. Even in the very bosom of the Soviet Union you were not safe from Wall Street agents posing as Soviet citizenesses, who would try, though basically without success, to undermine your principles of manly chastity. One would have to retaliate by reinforced proletarian watchfulness, exemplified by the gathering of confidential information, upon returning to the United States.

Mr. Robert Connecticut Smith stood next to him, secretarial,

correct, with a large brief-case, looking strenuously boyant if a little tired for an old youngster of twenty-nine. (But give him a chance—just you give him a single chance!)

Walter M. Watkins, the old man himself—for now in the morning light he seemed old indeed, a power-house come to a stop—looked inside, with heavy eyes and an odd shyness. "I am leaving," he said to Bebitz quietly. To the room at large, not looking at Ursula, he said, "Good-bye." He turned, a man with bent, heavy shoulders, and was gone, a moment later.

"Well," said Bebitz. "I must not leave him. There is much to be discussed. Work calling. Another day. Farewell. Toboggen." Noticing Citizeness Varbarova move towards him, he asked wearily, "What more do you want?"

She said, mournfully stubborn, "We haven't got a word for the local paper yet. At least a personal line about yourself."

He said, "There is nothing personal about myself." He looked at Toboggen, and said, "A monk."

"Bebitz," said Ursula in an undertone.

He said to the journalist, "You can write, I am a widower."

"Bebitz," said Ursula, "I just came back once more to say good-bye, Bebitz. I only——"

The railway engine's whistle called out.

Bebitz stepped up to Ursula and kissed her forehead. "Good-bye," he said, white-faced and smiling.

She said, "Bebitz, I really just came back—— I'm really prepared——"

The whistle called out again.

He said, "This district is under-organized. Badly getting out of hand. There is such a lot of youth-organizing to do, here in this district—pending your accompanying your father to the United States. A world of work for you to do there, too. Rouse goodwill. Carry the torch of enlightenment. Strengthen peace. Strengthen peace!"

"Think so?" she said, scarcely audible.

The whistle called out.

He said, "They are waiting for me. Good-bye, good-bye."

The young man, palely manful, carrying the suitcase and panting a little under the heavy weight, turned up in the doorway.

Bebitz said, "Ah, excellent. Citizen—what was the name again? Silber? Citizen Silber, the citizenship will want her case."

He left. The whistle was calling out.

Ursula said, "But—Bebitz." She called after him, "You can't negotiate without an interpreter. Do you hear? I'm going to interpret." She turned to Toboggen, alarmed, and said, "I'm willing to interpret, I'm willing. And Moscow, and I'm scheduled for twelve lectures in occupied Berlin." She turned, with a faint panic in her eyes, and shouted, "Bebitz." And turned again. Yes, she was panicky. To the Citizen Silber she said, "Twelve mass meetings of German women to explain to them—" Panic, panic was in her eyes and a faint despair as she looked at her father and went on, "—to explain to them the position of Soviet Woman in the Partisan Fight against the Fascist Invader."

She turned. The whistle was calling out. "I'm coming," she exclaimed, and seized her suitcase and dragged it outside. "Good-bye," she exclaimed, "good-bye," as she disappeared, a railway guard relieving her of the heavy case. As he did, she lost her paper bag. There it lay, white and forlorn, outside on the sunny, deserted pavement.

There were shouts. Two heavy, broad-beamed men, twin brothers probably, rushed forward, halfway down the short slope that will become the People's Garden, and stopped there to unfurl a banner, panting. Citizen Gorbakov of the Staprodisc waved a signal up to Senior Nurse Probinkova, who had shepherded her twelve walking patients out on to the flat roof, where they stood waving little flags. Holobenko being ill, the Citizeness Holobenka had dragged out the heavy camera with the tripod, diving breathlessly under the black cloth, just in time. It went 'Click'. Shouts there were, shouts.

It was against the background of these shouts that Ursula reappeared once more, running. Panting, she said to the Citizen Silber, "I lost my—oh, here it is." She took up the paper bag and said to her father, "I'll come again, next year on leave maybe—or on leave in two years, if there is a leave—absolutely, we'll all meet again." The whistle called out, impatient. "Coming," she exclaimed. And said to the two men, with tears all of a sudden

streaming from her eyes, "I am, not trained—I am not specially trained for such a—— It was a deviation! Good-bye, good-bye!"

She rushed off.

The whistle was calling out many times.

THE END

